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TABLE-TALK:

ORIGINAL ESSAYS

ON

MEN AND MANNERS.

BY

WILLIAM HAZLITT.

FOURTH EDITION.

Edited by his Son.

VOL. II.

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ESSAY I.

ON COFFEE-HOUSE POLITICIANS.

THERE is a set of people who fairly come under this denomination. They spend their time and their breath in coffee-houses and other places of public resort, hearing or repeating some new thing. They sit with a paper in their hands in the morning, and with a pipe in their mouths in the evening, discussing the contents of it. The 'Times,' the 'Morning Chronicle,' and the 'Herald' are necessary to their existence; in them "they live and move and have their being." The Evening Paper is impatiently expected, and called for at a certain critical minute: the news of the morning become stale and vapid by the dinner-hour. A fresher interest is required, an appetite for the latest-stirring information is excited with the return of their meals; and a glass of old port or humming ale hardly relishes as it ought without the infusion of some lively topic that had its birth with the

day, and perishes before night. "Then come in the sweets of the evening:"—the Queen, the coronation, the last new play, the next fight, the insurrection of the Greeks or Neapolitans, the price of stocks, or death of kings, keep them on the alert till bed-time. No question comes amiss to them that is quite new—none is ever heard of that is at all old.

"That of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker."

The World before the Flood or the Intermediate State of the Soul are never once thought of—such is the quick succession of subjects, the suddenness and fugitiveness of the interest taken in them, that the 'Twopenny Post-Bag' would be at present looked upon as an old-fashioned publication, and the Battle of Waterloo, like the proverb, is somewhat musty. It is strange that people should take so much interest at one time in what they so soon forget:—the truth is, they feel no interest in it at any time, but it does for something to talk about. Their ideas are served up to them, like their bill of fare, for the day; and the whole creation, history, war, politics, morals, poetry, metaphysics, is to them like a file of antedated newspapers, of no use, not even for reference, except the one which lies on the table!—You cannot take any of these persons at a greater disadvantage than before they are provided with their cue for the day. They ask

with a face of dreary vacuity, "Have you any thing new?"—and on receiving an answer in the negative, have nothing farther to say. Talk of the Westminster Election, the Bridge-street Association, or Mr Cobbett's Letter to John Cropper of Liverpool, and they are alive again. Beyond the last twenty-four hours, or the narrow round in which they move, they are utterly to seek, without ideas, feelings, interests, apprehensions of any sort; so that if you betray any knowledge beyond the vulgar routine of SECOND EDITIONS and first-hand private intelligence, you pass with them for a dull fellow, not acquainted with what is going forward in the world or with the practical value of things. I have known a person of this stamp censure John Cam Hobhouse for referring so often as he does to the affairs of the Greeks and Romans, as if the affairs of the nation were not sufficient for his hands: another asks you if a General in modern times cannot throw a bridge over a river without having studied Cæsar's Commentaries; and a third cannot see the use of the learned languages, as he has observed that the greatest proficients in them are rather taciturn than otherwise, and hesitate in their speech more than other people. A dearth of general information is almost necessary to the thorough-paced coffee-house politician; in the absence of thought, imagination, sentiment, he is attracted immediately to the

nearest common-place, and floats through the chosen regions of noise and empty rumours without difficulty and without distraction. Meet "any six of these men in buckram," and they will accost you with the same question and the same answer: they have seen it somewhere in print, or had it from some city-oracle, that morning; and the sooner they vent their opinions the better, for they will not keep. Like tickets of admission to the theatre for a particular evening, they must be used immediately, or they will be worth nothing: and the object is to find auditors for the one and customers for the other, neither of which is difficult; since people who have no ideas of their own are glad to hear what any one else has to say, as those who have not free admissions to the play will very obligingly take up with an occasional order. —It sometimes gives one a melancholy but mixed sensation to see one of the better sort of this class of politicians, not without talents or learning, absorbed for fifty years together in the all-engrossing topic of the day: mounting on it for exercise and recreation of his faculties, like the great horse at a riding-school, and after his short, improgressive, untired career, dismounting just where he got up; flying abroad in continual consternation on the wings of all the newspapers; waving his arm like a pump handle in sign of constant change, and spouting out tor-

rents of puddled politics from his mouth; dead to all interests but those of the state; seemingly neither older nor wiser for age; unaccountably enthusiastic, stupidly romantic, and actuated by no other motive than the mechanical operations of the spirit of newsmongering!*

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*It is not very long ago that I saw two Dissenting Ministers (the *Ultima Thule* of the sanguine, visionary temperament in politics) stuffing their pipes with dried currant-leaves, calling it Radical Tobacco, lighting it with a lens in the rays of the sun, and at every puff fancying that they undermined the Boroughmongers, as Trim blew up the army opposed to the Allies! They had *deceived the Senate.* Methinks I see them now smiling as in scorn of Corruption.

—— "Dream on, blest pair;
Yet happier if you knew your happiness,
And knew to know no more!"

The world of Reform that you dote on, like Berkeley's material world, lives only in your own brain, and long may it live there! Those same Dissenting Ministers throughout the country (I mean the descendants of the old Puritans) are to this hour a sort of Fifth-monarchy men: very turbulent fellows, in my opinion altogether incorrigible, and according to the suggestions of others, should be hanged out of the way without judge or jury for the safety of church and state. Marry, hang them! they may be left to die a natural death: the race is nearly extinct of itself, and can do little more good or harm!

"What things," exclaims Beaumont in his verses to Ben Jonson, "have we not seen done at the Mermaid!"

> —— Then when there hath been thrown
> Wit able enough to justify the town
> For three days past, wit that might warrant be
> For the whole city to talk foolishly!

I cannot say the same of the Southampton coffee-house, though it stands on classic ground, and is connected by local tradition with the great names of the Elizabethan age. What a falling off is here! Our ancestors of that period seem not only to be older by two hundred years, and proportionably wiser and wittier than we, but hardly a trace of them is left, not even the memory of what has been. How should I make my friend Mounsey stare, if I were to mention the name of my still better friend, old honest Signor Friscobaldo, the father of Bellafront:—yet his name was perhaps invented, and the scenes in which he figures unrivalled might for the first time have been read aloud to thrilling ears on this very spot! Who reads Deckar now? Or if by chance any one awakes the strings of that ancient lyre, and starts with delight as they yield wild, broken music, is he not accused of envy to the living Muse? What would a linen-draper from Holborn think, if I were to ask him after the clerk of St

Andrew's, the immortal, the forgotten Webster? His name and his works are no more heard of: though *these* were written with a pen of adamant, "within the red-leaved tables of the heart," his fame was "writ in water." So perishable is genius, so swift is time, so fluctuating is knowledge, and so far is it from being true that men perpetually accumulate the means of improvement and refinement. On the contrary, living knowledge is the tomb of the dead, and while light and worthless materials float on the surface, the solid and sterling as often sink to the bottom, and are swallowed up for ever in weeds and quicksands!—A striking instance of the short-lived nature of popular reputation occurred one evening at the Southampton, when we got into a dispute, the most learned and recondite that ever took place, on the comparative merits of Lord Byron and Gray. A country gentleman happened to drop in, and thinking to show off in London company, launched into a lofty panegyric on the Bard of Gray as the sublimest composition in the English language. This assertion presently appeared to be an anachronism, though it was probably the opinion in vogue thirty years ago, when the gentleman was last in town. After a little floundering, one of the party volunteered to express a more contemporary sentiment, by asking in a tone of mingled confidence and

doubt—"But you don't think, Sir, that Gray is to be mentioned as a poet in the same day with my Lord Byron?" The disputants were now at issue: all that resulted was that Gray was set aside as a poet who would not go down among readers of the present day, and his patron treated the works of the Noble Bard as mere ephemeral effusions, and spoke of poets that would be admired thirty years hence, which was the farthest stretch of his critical imagination. His antagonist's did not even reach so far. This was the most romantic digression we ever had; and the subject was not afterwards resumed.—No one here (generally speaking) has the slightest notion of anything that has happened, that has been said, thought, or done out of his own recollection. It would be in vain to hearken after those "wit-skirmishers," those "brave sublunary things," which were the employment and delight of the Beaumonts and Bens of former times: but we may happily repose on dulness, drift with the tide of nonsense, and gain an agreeable vertigo by lending an ear to endless controversies. The confusion, provided you do not mingle in the fray and try to disentangle it, is amusing and edifying enough. Every species of false wit and spurious argument may be learnt here by potent examples. Whatever observations you hear dropt, have been picked up in the same place or in a kindred at-

mosphere. There is a kind of conversation made up entirely of scraps and hearsay, as there are a kind of books made up entirely of references to other books. This may account for the frequent contradictions which abound in the discourse of persons educated and disciplined wholly in coffee-houses. There is nothing stable or well-grounded in it: it is "nothing but vanity, chaotic vanity." They hear a remark at the Globe which they do not know what to make of; another at the Rainbow in direct opposition to it; and not having time to reconcile them, vent both at the Mitre. In the course of half an hour, if they are not more than ordinarily dull, you are sure to find them on opposite sides of the question. This is the sickening part of it. People do not seem to talk for the sake of expressing their opinions, but to maintain an opinion for the sake of talking. We meet neither with modest ignorance nor studious acquirement. Their knowledge has been taken in too much by snatches to digest properly. There is neither sincerity nor system in what they say. They hazard the first crude notion that comes to hand, and then defend it how they can; which is for the most part but ill. "Don't you think," says Mounsey, "that Mr —— is a very sensible, well-informed man?"—"Why no," I say, "he seems to me to have no ideas of his own, and only to wait to see what others will

say in order to set himself against it. I should not think that is the way to get at the truth. I do not desire to be driven out of my conclusions (such as they are) merely to make way for his upstart pretensions."—"Then there is ——: what of him?"—"He might very well express all he has to say in half the time, and with half the trouble. Why should he beat about the bush as he does? He appears to be getting up a little speech, and practising on a smaller scale for a Debating Society—the lowest ambition a man can have. Besides, by his manner of drawling out his words, and interlarding his periods with inuendos and formal reservations, he is evidently making up his mind all the time which side he shall take. He puts his sentences together as printers set up types, letter by letter. There is certainly no principle of short-hand in his mode of elocution. He goes round for a meaning, and the sense waits for him. It is not conversation, but rehearsing a part. Men of education and men of the world order this matter better. They know what they have to say on a subject, and come to the point at once. Your coffee-house politician balances between what he heard last and what he shall say next; and not seeing his way clearly, puts you off with circumstantial phrases, and tries to gain time for fear of making a false step. This gentleman has heard some one admired for precision and

copiousness of language; and goes away, congratulating himself that he has not made a blunder in grammar or in rhetoric the whole evening. He is a theoretical *Quidnunc*—is tenacious in argument, though weary; carries his point thus and thus, bandies objections and answers with uneasy pleasantry, and when he has the worst of the dispute, puns very emphatically on his adversary's name, if it admits of that kind of misconstruction." George Kirkpatrick is admired by the waiter, who is a sleek hand,* for his temper in managing an argument. Any one else would perceive that the latent cause is not patience with his antagonist, but satisfaction with himself. I think this unmoved self-complacency, this cavalier, smooth, simpering indifference, is more annoying than the extremest violence or irritability. The one shows that your opponent does care something about you, and may be put out of his way by your remarks; the other seems to announce that nothing you say can shake his opinion a jot, that he has considered the whole of what

* William, our waiter, is dressed neatly in black, takes in the 'Tickler' (which many of the gentlemen like to look into), wears, I am told, a diamond pin in his shirt-front, has a music-master to teach him to play on the flageolet two hours before the maids are up, complains of confinement and a delicate constitution, and is a complete Master Stephen in his way.

you have to offer beforehand, and that he is in all respects much wiser and more acomplished than you. Such persons talk to grown people with the same air of patronage and condescension that they do to children. "They will explain"—is a familiar expression with them, thinking you can only differ from them in consequence of misconceiving what they say. Or if you detect them in any error in point of fact (as to acknowledged deficiency in wit or argument, they would smile at the idea), they add some correction to your correction, and thus have the whip-hand of you again, being more correct than you who corrected them. If you hint some obvious oversight, they know what you are going to say, and were aware of the objection before you uttered it:—"So shall their anticipation prevent your discovery." By being in the right you gain no advantage: by being in the wrong you are entitled to the benefit of their pity or scorn! It is sometimes curious to see a select group of our little Gotham getting about a knotty point that will bear a wager, as whether Dr Johnson's Dictionary was originally published in quarto or folio. The confident assertions, the cautious overtures, the length of time demanded to ascertain the fact, the precise terms of the forfeit, the provisos for getting out of paying it at last, lead to a long and inextricable discussion. George was how-

ever so convinced in his own mind that the 'Mourning Bride' was written by Shakspeare, that he ran headlong into the snare: the bet was decided, and the punch was drank. He has skill in numbers, and seldom exceeds his sevenpence.—He had a brother once, no Michael Cassio, no great arithmetician: Roger was a rare fellow, of the driest humour, and the nicest tact, of infinite sleights and evasions, of a picked phraseology, and the very soul of mimicry. I fancy I have some insight into physiognomy myself, but he could often expound to me at a single glance the characters of those of my acquaintance that I had been most at fault about. The account as it was cast up and balanced between us was not always very favourable. How finely, how truly, how gaily he took off the company at the Southampton! Poor and faint are my sketches compared to his! It was like looking into a *camera obscura*—you saw faces shining and speaking—the smoke curled, the lights dazzled, the oak wainscoting took a higher polish; there was old S——, tall and gaunt, with his couplet from Pope and case at Nisi Prius, Mudford eyeing the ventilator and lying *perdu* for a moral, and H—— and A—— taking another friendly finishing glass!—These and many more wind-falls of character he gave us in thought, word, and action. I remember his once describing three different persons

together to myself and Martin Burney, viz., the manager of a country theatre, a tragic and a comic performer, till we were ready to tumble on the floor with laughing at the oddity of their humours, and at Roger's extraordinary powers of ventriloquism, bodily and mental; and Burney said (such was the vividness of the scene) that when he awoke the next morning, he wondered what three amusing characters he had been in company with the evening before. Oh! it was a rich treat to see him describe Mudford, him of the Courier, the Contemplative Man, who wrote an answer to Cœlebs, coming into a room, folding up his great coat, taking out a little pocket volume, laying it down to think, rubbing the calf of his leg with grave self-complacency, and starting out of his reverie when spoken to with an inimitable vapid exclamation of "Eh!" Mudford is like a man made of fleecy hosiery: Roger was lank and lean "as is the ribbed sea-sand." Yet he seemed the very man he represented, as fat, pert, and dull as it was possible to be. I have not seen him of late:—

"For Kais is fled, and our tents are forlorn."

But I thought of him the other day when the news of the death of Buonaparte came, whom we both loved for precisely contrary reasons, he for putting down the rabble of the people

and I because he had put down the rabble of kings. Perhaps this event may rouse him from his lurking-place, where he lies like reynard, with head declined, in feigned slumbers!" *—

* His account of Dr Whittle was prodigious—of his occult sagacity, of his eyes prominent and wild like a hare's, fugacious of followers, of the arts by which he had left the City to lure the patients that he wanted after him to the West-end, of the ounce of tea that he purchased by stratagem as an unusual treat to his guest, and of the narrow winding staircase, from the height of which he contemplated in security the imaginary approach of duns. He was a large, plain, fair-faced Moravian preacher, turned physician. He was an honest man, but vain of he knew not what. He was once sitting where Sarratt was playing a game at chess without seeing the board; and after remaining for some time absorbed in silent wonder, he turned suddenly to me and said, "Do you know, Mr Hazlitt, that I think there is something I could do?" "Well, what is that?" "Why perhaps you would not guess, but I think I could dance, I'm sure I could; ay, I could dance like Vestris!"—Sarratt, who was a man of various accomplishments (among others one of the Fancy), afterwards bared his arm to convince us of his muscular strength, and Mrs Whittle going out of the room with another lady, said, "Do you know, Madam, the Doctor is a great jumper!" Moliere could not outdo this. Never shall I forget his pulling off his coat to eat beef-steaks on equal terms with Martin Burney. Life is short, but full of mirth and pastime, did we not so soon forget what we have laughed at, perhaps that we may not remember what we have cried at!—Sarratt the chess-player was an extraordinary man. He had the same tenacious, epileptic faculty in other things that

I had almost forgotten the Southampton Tavern. We for some time took C—— for a lawyer, from a certain arguteness of voice and slenderness of neck, and from his having a quibble and a laugh at himself always ready. On inquiry, however, he was found to be a patent-medicine seller, and having leisure in his apprenticeship, and a forwardness of parts, he had taken to study Blackstone and the Statutes at Large. On appealing to Mounsey for his opinion on this matter, he observed pithily, "I don't like so much law: the gentlemen here seem fond of law, but I have law enough at chambers." One sees a great deal of the humours and tempers of men in a place of this sort, and may almost gather their opinions from their characters. There is E——, a fellow that is always in the wrong—who puts might for right on all occasions—a Tory in grain—

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he had at chess, and could no more get any other ideas out of his mind than he could those of the figures on the board. He was a great reader, but had not the least taste. Indeed the violence of his memory tyrannised over and destroyed all power of selection. He could repeat Ossian by heart, without knowing the best passage from the worst; and did not perceive he was tiring you to death by giving you an account of the breed, education, and manners of fighting-dogs for hours together. The sense of reality quite superseded the distinction between the pleasurable and the painful. He was altogether a mechanical philosopher.

who has no one idea but what has been instilled into him by custom and authority—an everlasting babbler on the stronger side of the question —querulous and dictatorial, and with a peevish whine in his voice like a beaten schoolboy. He is a great advocate for the Bourbons, and for the National Debt. The former he affirms to be the choice of the French people, and the latter he insists is necessary to the salvation of these kingdoms. This last point a little inoffensive gentleman among us, of a saturnine aspect but simple conceptions, cannot comprehend. "I will tell you, sir, I will make my proposition so clear, that you will be convinced of the truth of my observation in a moment. Consider, sir, the number of trades that would be thrown out of employ, if it were done away with: what would become of the procelain manufacture without it?" Any stranger to overhear one of these debates would swear that the English as a nation are bad logicians. Mood and figure are unknown to them. They do not argue by the book. They arrive at conclusions through the force of prejudice, and on the principles of contradiction. Mr E—— having thus triumphed in argument, offers a flower to the notice of the company as a specimen of his flower-garden, a curious exotic, nothing like it to be found in this kingdom, talks of his carnations, of his country house, and old English

hospitality, but never invites any of his friends to come down and take their Sunday's dinner with him. He is mean and ostentatious at the same time, insolent and servile, does not know whether to treat those he converses with as if they were his porters or his customers: the prentice-boy is not yet wiped out of him, and his imagination still hovers between his mansion at ——, and the workhouse. Opposed to him and to every one else, is K——, a radical reformer and logician, who makes clear work of the taxes and national debt, reconstructs the Government from the first principles of things, shatters the Holy Alliance at a blow, grinds out the future prospects of society with a machine, and is setting out afresh with the commencement of the French Revolution five-and-twenty years ago, as if on an untried experiment. He minds nothing but the formal agreement of his premises and his conclusions, and does not stick at obstacles in the way nor consequences in the end. If there was but one side of a question, he would always be in the right. He casts up one column of the account to admiration, but totally forgets and rejects the other. His ideas lie like square pieces of wood in his brain, and may be said to be piled up on a stiff architectural principle, perpendicularly, and at right angles. There is no inflection, no modification, no graceful embellishment, no Corinthian capi-

tals. I never heard him agree to two propositions together, or to more than half a one at a time. His rigid love of truth bends to nothing but his habitual love of disputation. He puts one in mind of one of those long-headed politicians and frequenters of coffee-houses mentioned in Berkeley's Minute Philosopher, who would make nothing of such old-fashioned fellows as Plato and Aristotle. He has the new light strong upon him, and he knocks other people down with its solid beams. He denies that he has got certain views out of Cobbett, though he allows that there are excellent ideas occasionally to be met with in that writer. It is a pity that this enthusiastic and unqualified regard to truth should be accompanied with an equal exactness of expenditure and unrelenting eye to the main-chance. He brings a bunch of radishes with him for cheapness, and gives a band of musicians at the door a penny, observing that he likes their performance better than all the Opera-squalling. This brings the severity of his political principles into question, if not into contempt. He would abolish the National Debt from motives of personal economy, and objects to Mr Canning's pension because it perhaps takes a farthing a year out of his own pocket. A great deal of radical reasoning has its source in this feeling.—He bestows no small quantity of his tediousness upon Mounsey, on

whose mind all these formulas and diagrams fall like seed on stony ground: "while the manna is descending," he shakes his ears, and in the intervals of the debate, insinuates an objection, and calls for another half-pint. I have sometimes said to him—"Any one to come in here without knowing you, would take you for the most disputatious man alive, for you are always engaged in an argument with somebody or other." The truth is, that Mounsey is a good-natured, gentlemanly man, who notwithstanding, if appealed to, will not let an absurd or unjust proposition pass without expressing his dissent; and therefore he is a sort of mark for all those (and we have several of that stamp) who like to tease other people's understandings, as wool-combers tease wool. He is certainly the flower of the flock. He is the oldest frequenter of the place, the latest sitter-up, well-informed, inobtrusive, and that sturdy old English character, a lover of truth and justice. I never knew Mounsey approve of anything unfair or illiberal. There is a candour and uprightness about his mind which can neither be wheedled nor brow-beat into unjustifiable complaisance. He looks straight-forward as he sits with his glass in his hand, turning neither to the right nor the left, and I will venture to say that he has never had a sinister object in view through life. Mrs Battle (it is recorded in her Opinions

on Whist) could not make up her mind to use the word "*Go.*" Mounsey from long practice has got over this difficulty, and uses it incessantly. It is no matter what adjunct follows in the train of this despised monosyllable:—whatever liquid comes after this prefix is welcome. Mounsey, without being the most communicative, is the most conversible man I know. The social principle is inseparable from his person. If he has nothing to say, he drinks your health; and when you cannot from the rapidity and carelessness of his utterance catch what he says, you assent to it with equal confidence: you know his meaning is good. His favourite phrase is, "We have all of us something of the coxcomb;" and yet he has none of it himself. Before I had exchanged half a dozen sentences with Mounsey, I found that he knew several of my old acquaintance (an immediate introduction of itself, for the discussing the characters and foibles of common friends is a great sweetener and cement of friendship)—and had been intimate with most of the wits and men about town for the last twenty years. He knew Tobin, Wordsworth, Porson, Wilson, Paley, Erskine, and many others. He speaks of Paley's pleasantry and unassuming manners, and describes Porson's long potations and long quotations formerly at the Cider-Cellar in a very lively way. He has doubts, however, as to that sort of learning.

On my saying that I had never seen the Greek Professor but once, at the Library of the London Institution, when he was dressed in an old rusty black coat, with cobwebs hanging to the skirts of it, and with a large patch of coarse brown paper covering the whole length of his nose, looking for all the world like a drunken carpenter, and talking to one of the Proprietors with an air of suavity, approaching to condescension, Mounsey could not help expressing some little uneasiness for the credit of classical literature. "I submit, sir, whether common sense is not the principal thing? What is the advantage of genius and learning if they are of no use in the conduct of life?"—Mounsey is one who loves the hours that usher in the morn, when a select few are left in twos and threes like stars before the break of day, and when the discourse and the ale are "aye growing better and better." Wells, Mounsey, and myself were all that remained one evening. We had sat together several hours without being tired of one another's company. The conversation turned on the Beauties of Charles the Second's Court at Windsor, and from thence to Count Grammont, their gallant and gay historian. We took our favourite passages in turn—one preferring that of Killigrew's country cousin, who having been resolutely refused by Miss Warminster (one of the Maids of Honour), when he

found she had been unexpectedly brought to bed, fell on his knees and thanked God that now she might take compassion on him—another insisting that the Chevalier Hamilton's assignation with Lady Chesterfield, when she kept him all night shivering in an old out-house, was better. Jacob Hall's prowess was not forgotten, nor the story of Miss Stuart's garters. I was getting on in my way with that delicate *endroit*, in which Miss Churchill is first introduced at court and is besieged (as a matter of course) by the Duke of York, who was gallant as well as bigoted on system. His assiduities however soon slackened, owing (it is said) to her having a pale, thin face; till one day, as they were riding out hunting together, she fell from her horse, and was taken up almost lifeless. The whole assembled court were thrown by this event into admiration that such a body should belong to such a face* (so transcendant a pattern was she of the female form), and the Duke was fixed. This I contended was striking, affecting, and grand, the sublime of amorous biography, and said I could conceive of nothing finer than the idea of a young person in his situation, who was the

* "Ils ne pouvoient croire qu'un corps de cette beauté fût de quelque chose au visage de Mademoiselle Churchill." —MEMOIRES DE GRAMMONT, Vol. II, p. 254.

object of indifference or scorn from outward appearance, with the proud suppressed consciousness of a Goddess-like symmetry, locked up by "fear and niceness, the hand-maids of all women," from the wonder and worship of mankind. I said so then, and I think so now: my tongue grew wanton in the praise of this passage, and I believe it bore the bell from its competitors. Wells then spoke of Lucius Apuleius and his Golden Ass, which contains the story of Cupid and Psyche, with other matter rich and rare, and went on to the romance of Heliodorus, Theagenes and Chariclea. This, as he affirmed, opens with a pastoral landscape equal to Claude, and in the presiding deities of Love and Wine appear in all their pristine strength, youth, and grace, crowded and worshipped as of yore. The night waned, but our glasses brightened, enriched with the pearls of Grecian story. Our cup-bearer slept in a corner of the room, like another Endymion, in the pale ray of an half-extinguished lamp, and starting up at a fresh summons for a farther supply, he swore it was too late, and was inexorable to entreaty. Mounsey sat with his hat on and with a hectic flush in his face while any hope remained, but as soon as we rose to go, he darted out of the room as quick as lightning, determined not to be the last that went.—I said some time after to the waiter, that "Mr Mounsey

was no flincher."—"Oh! sir," says he, "you should have known him formerly, when Mr H—— and Mr A—— used to be here. Now he is quite another man: he seldom stays later than one or two."—"Why, did they keep it up much later then?"—"Oh! yes; and used to sing catches and all sorts."—"What, did Mr Mounsey sing catches?"—"He joined chorus, sir, and was as merry as the best of them. He was always a pleasant gentleman!"—This H—— and A—— succumbed in the fight. A—— was a dry Scotchman, H—— a good-natured, hearty Englishman. I do not mean that the same character applies to all Scotchmen or to all Englishmen. H—— was of the Pipe-Office (not unfitly appointed), and in his cheerfuller cups would delight to speak of a widow and a bowling-green, that ran in his head to the last. "What is the good of talking of those things now?" said the man of utility. "I don't know," replied the other, quaffing another glass of sparkling ale, and with a lambent fire playing in his eye and round his bald forehead —(he had a head that Sir Joshua would have made something bland and genial of)—"I don't know, but they were delightful to me at the time, and are still pleasant to talk and think of." *Such a one*, in Touchstone's phrase, *is a natural philosopher;* and in nine cases out of ten that sort of philosophy is the best! I could enlarge

this sketch, such as it is; but to prose on to the end of the chapter might prove less profitable than tedious.

I like very well to sit in a room where there are people talking on subjects I know nothing of, if I am only allowed to sit silent and as a spectator. But I do not much like to join in the conversation, except with people and on subjects to my taste. Sympathy is necessary to society. To look on a variety of faces, humours, and opinions is sufficient: to mix with others, agreement as well as variety is indispensable. What makes good society? I answer, in one word, real fellowship. Without a similitude of tastes, acquirements, and pursuits (whatever may be the difference of tempers and characters), there can be no intimacy or even casual intercourse, worth the having. What makes the most agreeable party? A number of people with a number of ideas in common, "yet so as with a difference;" that is, who can put one or more subjects which they have all studied in the greatest variety of entertaining or useful lights. Or in other words, a succession of good things said with good humour, and addressed to the understandings of those who hear them, make the most desirable conversation. Ladies, lovers, beaux, wits, philosophers, the fashionable or the vulgar, are the fittest company for one another. The discourse

at Randall's is the best for boxers: that at Long's for lords and loungers. I prefer Hunt's conversation almost to any other person's, because, with a familiar range of subjects, he colours with a totally new and sparkling light, reflected from his own character. Elia, the grave and witty, says things not to be surpassed in essence: but the manner is more painful and less a relief to my own thoughts. Some one conceived he could not be an excellent companion, because he was seen walking down the side of the Thames, *passibus iniquis*, after dining at Richmond. The objection was not valid. I will, however, admit that the said Elia is the worst company in the world in bad company, if it be granted me that in good company he is nearly the best that can be. He is one of those of whom it may be said, *Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your manners.* He is the creature of sympathy, and makes good whatever opinion you seem to entertain of him. He cannot outgo the apprehensons of the circle; and invariably acts up or down to the point of refinement or vulgarity at which they pitch him. He appears to take a pleasure in exaggerating the prejudices of strangers against him; a pride in confirming the prepossessions of friends. In whatever scale of intellect he is placed, he is as lively or as stupid as the rest can be for their lives. If you think him odd and ridiculous,

he becomes more and more so every minute, *à la folie*, till he is a wonder gazed at by all—set him against a good wit and a ready apprehension, and he brightens more and more—

> "Or like a gate of steel
> Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
> Its figure and its heat."

We had a pleasant party one evening at Barry Cornwall's. A young literary bookseller who was present went away delighted with the elegance of the repast, and spoke in raptures of a servant in green livery and a patent lamp. I thought myself that the charm of the evening consisted in some talk about Beaumont and Fletcher and the old poets, in which every one took part or interest, and in a consciousness that we could not pay our host a better compliment than in thus alluding to studies in which he excelled, and in praising authors whom he had imitated with feeling and sweetness !—I should think it may be also laid down as a rule on this subject, that to constitute good company a certain proportion of hearers and speakers is requisite. Coleridge makes good company for this reason. He immediately establishes the principle of the division of labour in this respect, wherever he comes. He takes his cue as speaker, and the rest of the party theirs as listeners—a "Circean herd" —without any previous arrangement having

been gone through. I will just add that there can be no good society without perfect freedom from affectation and constraint. If the unreserved communication of feeling or opinion leads to offensive familiarity, it is not well. But it is no better where the absence of offensive remarks arises only from formality and an assumed respectfulness of manner.

I do not think there is anything deserving the name of society to be found out of London: and that for the two following reasons. First, there is *neighbourhood* elsewhere, accidental or unavoidable acquaintance: people are thrown together by chance or grow together like trees; but you can pick your society nowhere but in London. The very persons that of all others you would wish to associate with in almost every line of life (or at least of intellectual pursuit), are to be met with there. It is hard if out of a million of people you cannot find half a dozen to your liking. Individuals may seem lost and hid in the size of the place: but in fact from this very circumstance you are within two or three miles' reach of persons that without it you would be some hundreds apart from. Secondly, London is the only place in which each individual in company is treated according to his value in company, and to that only. In every part of the kingdom he carries another character about with him, which supersedes the intel-

lectual or social one. It is known in Manchester or Liverpool what every man in the room is worth in land or money; what are his connexions and prospects in life—and this gives a character of servility or arrogance, of mercenariness or impertinence to the whole of provincial intercourse. You laugh not in proportion to a man's wit, but his wealth: you have to consider not what, but whom you contradict. You speak by the pound, and are heard by the rood. In the metropolis there is neither time nor inclination for these remote calculations. Every man depends on the quantity of sense, wit, or good manners he brings into society for the reception he meets with in it. A member of parliament soon finds his level as a commoner: the merchant and manufacturer cannot bring his goods to market here: the great landed proprietor shrinks from being the lord of acres into a pleasant companion or a dull fellow. When a visitor enters or leaves a room, it is not inquired whether he is rich or poor, whether he lives in a garret or a palace, or comes in his own or a hackney-coach, but whether he has a good expression of countenance, with an unaffected manner, and whether he is a man of understanding or a blockhead. These are the circumstances by which you make a favourable impression on the company, and by which they estimate you in the abstract. In the country

they consider whether you have a vote at the next election, or a place in your gift; and measure the capacity of others to instruct or entertain them by the strength of their pockets and their credit with their banker. Personal merit is at a prodigious discount in the provinces. I like the country very well, if I want to enjoy my own company: but London is the only place for equal society, or where a man can say a good thing or express an honest opinion without subjecting himself to being insulted, unless he first lays his purse on the table to back his pretensions to talent or independence of spirit. I speak from experience. *

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* When I was young, I spent a good deal of my time at Manchester and Liverpool; and I confess I give the preference to the former. There you were oppressed only by the aristocracy of wealth; in the latter by the aristocracy of wealth and letters by turns. You could not help feeling that some of their great men were authors among merchants and merchants among authors. Their bread was buttered on both sides, and they had you at a disadvantage either way. The Manchester cotton-spinners, on the contrary, set up no pretensions beyond their looms, were hearty good fellows, and took any information or display of ingenuity on other subjects in good part. I remember well being introduced to a distinguished patron of art and rising merit at a little distance from Liverpool, and was received with every mark of attention and politeness, till the conversation turning on talian literature, our host remarked that

there was nothing in the English language corresponding to the severity of the Italian ode—except perhaps Dryden's Alexander's Feast, and Pope's St Cecilia! I could no longer contain my desire to display my smattering in criticism, and began to maintain that Pope's Ode was, as it appeared to me, far from an example of severity in writing. I soon perceived what I had done, but here am I writing *Table-talks* in consequence. Alas! I knew as little of the world then as I do now. I never could understand anything beyond an abstract definition.

ESSAY II.

ON THE ARISTOCRACY OF LETTERS.

"Ha! here's three of us are sophisticated:—off, you lendings."——

THERE is such a thing as an aristocracy or privileged order in letters, which has sometimes excited my wonder, and sometimes my spleen. We meet with authors who have never done anything, but who have a vast reputation for what they could have done. Their names stand high, and are in everybody's mouth, but their works are never heard of, or had better remain undiscovered for the sake of their admirers.—*Stat nominis umbra*—their pretensions are lofty and unlimited, as they have nothing to rest upon, or because it is impossible to confront them with the proofs of their deficiency. If you inquire farther, and insist upon some act of authorship to establish the claims of these Epicurean votaries of the Muses, you find that they had a great reputation at Cambridge, that they were senior wranglers or successful prize-

essayists, that they visit at Holland House, and to support that honour, must be supposed of course to occupy the first rank in the world of letters.* It is possible, however, that they have some manuscript work in hand, which is of too much importance (and the writer has too much at stake in publishing it) hastily to see the light: or perhaps they once had an article in the 'Edinburgh Review,' which was much admired at the time, and is kept by them ever since as a kind of diploma and unquestionable testimonial of merit. They are not like Grub-street authors, who write for bread, and are paid by the sheet. Like misers who hoard their wealth, they are supposed to be masters of all the wit and sense they do not impart to the public. "Continents have most of what they contain," says a considerable philosopher; and

* Lord Holland had made a diary (in the manner of Boswell) of the conversation held at his house, and read it at the end of a week *pro bono publico*. Sir James Mackintosh made a considerable figure in it, and a celebrated lyric poet none at all, merely answering Yes and No. With this result he was by no means satisfied, and talked incessantly from that day forward. At the end of the week he asked, with some anxiety and triumph, if his Lordship had continued his diary, expecting himself to shine in "the first row of the rubric." To which his Noble Patron answered in the negative, with an intimation that it had not appeared to him worth while. Our poet was thus thrown again into the background, and Sir James remained master of the field!

these persons, it must be confessed, have a prodigious command over themselves in the expenditure of light and learning. The Oriental curse—"O that my enemy had written a book"—hangs suspended over them. By never committing themselves, they neither give a handle to the malice of the world, nor excite the jealousy of friends; and keep all the reputation they have got, not by discreetly blotting, but by never writing a line. Some one told Sheridan, who was always busy about some new work and never advancing any farther in it, that he would not write because he was afraid of the author of the 'School for Scandal.' So these idle pretenders are afraid of undergoing a comparison with themselves in something they have never done, but have had credit for doing. They do not acquire celebrity, they assume it; and escape detection by never venturing out of their imposing and mysterious *incognito*. They do not let themselves down by every-day work: for them to appear in print is a work of supererogation as much as in lords and kings, and like gentlemen with a large landed estate, they live on their established character, and do nothing (or as little as possible) to increase or lose it. There is not a more deliberate piece of grave imposture going. I know a person of this description who has been employed many years (by implication) on a translation of Thucydides,

of which no one ever saw a word, but it does not answer the purpose of bolstering up a factitious reputation the less on that account. The longer it is delayed and kept sacred from the vulgar gaze, the more it swells into imaginary consequence; the labour and care required for a work of this kind being immense:—and then there are no faults in an unexecuted translation. The only impeccable writers are those who never wrote. Another is an oracle on subjects of taste and classical erudition, because (he says at least) he reads Cicero once a year to keep up the purity of his Latinity. A third makes the indecency pass for the depth of his researches and for a high gusto in *virtù*, till from his seeing nothing in the finest remains of ancient art, the world by the merest accident find out that there is nothing in him. There is scarcely anything that a grave face with an impenetrable manner will not accomplish, and whoever is weak enough to impose upon himself, will have wit enough to impose upon the public—particularly if he can make it their interest to be deceived by shallow boasting, and contrives not to hurt their self-love by sterling acquirements. Do you suppose that the understood translation of Thucydides cost its supposed author nothing? A select party of friends and admirers dine with him once a week at a magnificent town-mansion, or a more elegant and picturesque retreat in the

country. They broach their Horace and their old hock, and sometimes allude with a considerable degree of candour to the defects of works which are brought out by contemporary writers —the ephemeral offspring of haste and necessity!

Among other things, the learned languages are a ready passport to this sort of unmeaning, unanalysed reputation. They presently lift a man up among the celestial constellations, the signs of the Zodiac (as it were) and third heaven of inspiration, from whence he looks down on those who are toiling on in this lower sphere, and earning their bread by the sweat of their brain, at leisure and in scorn. If the graduates in this way condescend to express their thoughts in English, it is understood to be *infra dignitatem*—such light and unaccustomed essays do not fit the ponderous gravity of their pen—they only draw to advantage and with full justice to themselves in the bow of the ancients. Their native-tongue is to them strange, inelegant, unapt, and crude. They "cannot command it to any utterance of harmony. They have not the skill." This is true enough; but you must not say so, under a heavy penalty—the displeasure of pedants and blockheads. It would be sacrilege against the privileged classes, the Aristocracy of Letters. What! will you affirm that a profound Latin scholar, a perfect Grecian,

cannot write a page of common sense or grammar? Is it not to be presumed, by all the charters of the Universities and the foundations of grammar-schools, that he who can speak a dead language must be *a fortiori* conversant with his own? Surely, the greater implies the less. He who knows every science and every art cannot be ignorant of the most familiar forms of speech. Or if this plea is found not to hold water, then our scholastic bungler is said to be above this vulgar trial of skill, "something must be excused to want of practice—but did you not observe the elegance of the Latinity, how well that period would become a classical and studied dress?" Thus defects are "monster'd" into excellencies, and they screen their idol, and require you, at your peril, to pay prescriptive homage to false concords and inconsequential criticisms, because the writer of them has the character of the first or second Greek or Latin scholar in the kingdom. If you do not swear to the truth of these spurious credentials, you are ignorant and malicious, a quack and a scribbler—*flagranti delicto!* Thus the man who can merely read and construe some old author, is of a class superior to any living one, and, by parity of reasoning, to those old authors themselves: the poet or prose writer of true and original genius, by the courtesy of custom, "ducks to the learned fool:"

or as the author of Hudibras has so well stated the same thing :—

> ——"He that is but able to express
> No sense at all in several languages,
> Will pass for learneder than he that's known
> To speak the strongest reason in his own."

These preposterous and unfounded claims of mere scholars to precedence in the commonwealth of letters, which they set up so formally themselves and which others so readily bow to, are partly owing to traditional prejudice :— there was a time when learning was the only distinction from ignorance, and when there was no such thing as popular English literature. Again, there is something more palpable and positive in this kind of acquired knowledge, like acquired wealth, which the vulgar easily recognise. That others know the meaning of signs which they are confessedly and altogether ignorant of, is to them both a matter of fact and a subject of endless wonder. The languages are worn like a dress by a man, and distinguish him sooner than his natural figure; and we are, from motives of self-love, inclined to give others credit for the ideas they have borrowed or have come into direct possession of, rather than for those that originally belong to them and are exclusively their own. The merit in them and the implied inferiority in ourselves is

less. Learning is a kind of external appendage or transferable property—

" 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and may be any man's "—

Genius and understanding are a man's self, an integrant part of his personal identity; and the title to these last, as it is the most difficult to be ascertained, is also the most grudgingly acknowledged. Few persons would pretend to deny that Porson had more Greek than they. It was a question of fact which might be put to the immediate proof, and could not be gainsaid. But the meanest frequenter of the Cider-cellar or the Hole-in-the-Wall would be inclined, in his own conceit, to dispute the palm of wit or sense with him; and indemnify his self-complacency for the admiration paid to living learning by significant hints to friends and casual droppers-in, that the greatest men, when you came to know them, were not without their weak sides as well as others.—Pedants, I will add here, talk to the vulgar as pedagogues talk to school-boys, on an understood principle of condescension and superiority, and therefore make little progress in the knowledge of men or things. While they fancy they are accommodating themselves to, or else assuming airs of importance over, inferior capacities, these inferior capacities are really laughing at them. There can be no true superiority but what

arises out of the pre-supposed ground of equality: there can be no improvement but from the free communication and comparing of ideas. Kings and nobles, for this reason, receive little benefit from society—where all is submission on one side, and condescension on the other. The mind strikes out truth by collision, as steel strikes fire from the flint!

There are whole families who are born classical, and are entered in the heralds' college of reputation by the right of consanguinity. Literature, like nobility, runs in the blood. There is the Burney family. There is no end of it or its pretensions. It produces wits, scholars, novelists, musicians, artists in "numbers numberless." The name is alone a passport to the Temple of Fame. Those who bear it are free of Parnassus by birth-right. The founder of it was himself an historian and a musician, but more of a courtier and man of the world than either. The secret of his success may perhaps be discovered in the following passage, where, in alluding to three eminent performers on different instruments, he says, "These three illustrious personages were introduced at the Emperour's court," &c.; speaking of them as if they were foreign ambassadors or princes of the blood, and thus magnifying himself and his profession. This overshadowing manner carries nearly everything before it, and mystifies a

great many. There is nothing like putting the best face upon things, and leaving others to find out the difference. He who could call three musicians "personages," would himself play a personage through life, and succeed in his leading object. Sir Joshua Reynolds, remarking on this passage, said, "No one had a greater respect than he had for his profession, but that he should never think of applying to it epithets that were appropriated merely to external rank and distinction." Madame D'Arblay, it must be owned, had cleverness enough to stock a whole family, and to set up her cousin-germans, male and female, for wits and virtuosos to the third and fourth generation. The rest have done nothing, that I know of, but keep up the name.

The most celebrated author in modern times has written without a name, and has been baronetted for anonymous productions. Lord Byron complains that Horace Walpole was not properly appreciated, "first, because he was a gentleman, and secondly, because he was a nobleman." His Lordship stands in one, at least, of the predicaments here mentioned, and yet he has had justice, or somewhat more, done him. He towers above his fellows by all the height of the peerage. If the poet lends a grace to the nobleman, the nobleman pays it back to the poet with interest. What a fine

addition is ten thousand a year and a title to the flaunting pretensions of a modern rhapsodist! His name so accompanied becomes the mouth well: it is repeated thousands of times, instead of hundreds, because the reader in being familiar with the Poet's works seems to claim acquaintance with the Lord.

> "Let but a lord once own the happy lines:
> How the wit brightens, and the style refines!"

He smiles at the high-flown praise or petty cavils of little men. Does he make a slip in decorum, which Milton declares to be the principal thing? His proud crest and armorial bearings support him:—no bend-sinister slurs his poetical escutcheon! Is he dull, or does he put off some trashy production on the public? It is not charged to his account, as a deficiency which he must make good at the peril of his admirers. His Lordship is not answerable for the negligence or extravagances of his Muse. He "bears a charmed reputation, which must not yield" like one of vulgar birth. The Noble Bard is for this reason scarcely vulnerable to the critics. The double barrier of his pretensions baffles their puny, timid efforts. Strip off some of his tarnished laurels, and the coronet appears glittering beneath: restore them, and it still shines through with keener lustre. In fact, his Lordship's blaze of reputation cul-

minates from his rank and place in society. He sustains two lofty and imposing characters; and in order to simplify the process of our admiration, and "leave no rubs or botches in the way," we equalise his pretensions, and take it for granted that he must be as superior to other men in genius as he is in birth. Or, to give a more familiar solution of the enigma, the Poet and the Peer agree to honour each other's acceptances on the bank of Fame, and sometimes cozen the town to some tune between them.—Really, however, and with all his privileges, Lord Byron might as well not have written that strange letter about Pope. I could not afford it, poor as I am. Why does he pronounce, *ex cathedrâ* and robed, that Cowper is no poet? Cowper was a gentleman and of noble family like his critic. He was a teacher of morality as well as a describer of nature, which is more than his Lordship is. His John Gilpin will last as long as Beppo, and his verses to Mary are not less touching than the farewell. If I had ventured upon such an assertion as this, it would have been worse for me than finding out a borrowed line in the 'Pleasures of Hope.'

There is not a more helpless or more despised animal than a mere author, without any extrinsic advantages of birth, breeding, or fortune to set him off. The real ore of talents or learning must be stamped before it will pass current.

To be at all looked upon as an author, a man must be something more or less than an author —a rich merchant, a banker, a lord, or a ploughman. He is admired for something foreign to himself, that acts as a bribe to the servility or a set-off to the envy of the community. "What should such fellows as we do, crawling betwixt heaven and earth;"—"coining our hearts for drachmas;" now scorched in the sun, now shivering in the breeze, now coming out in our newest gloss and best attire, like swallows in the spring, now "sent back like hollowmas or shortest day?" The best wits, like the handsomest faces *upon the town*, lead a harassing, precarious life—are taken up for the bud and promise of talent, which they no sooner fulfil than they are thrown aside like an old fashion—are caressed without reason, and insulted with impunity—are subject to all the caprice, the malice, and fulsome advances of that great keeper, the Public—and in the end come to no good, like all those who lavish their favours on mankind at large and look to the gratitude of the world for their reward. Instead of this set of Grub-street authors, the mere *canaille* of letters, this corporation of Mendicity, this ragged regiment of genius suing at the corners of streets in *forma pauperis*, give me the gentleman and scholar, with a good house over his head and a handsome table "with wine of Attic taste"

to ask his friends to, and where want and sorrow never come. Fill up the sparkling bowl, heap high the dessert with roses crowned, bring out the hot-pressed poem, the vellum manuscripts, the medals, the portfolios, the intaglios—this is the true model of the life of a man of taste and *virtù*—the possessors, not the inventors of these things, are the true benefactors of mankind and ornaments of letters. Look in, and there, amidst silver services and shining chandeliers, you will see the man of genius at his proper post, picking his teeth and mincing an opinion, sheltered by rank bowing to wealth—a poet framed, glazed, and hung in a striking light: not a straggling weed, torn and trampled on; not a poor *Kit-run-the-street*, but a powdered beau, a sycophant plant, an exotic reared in a glass case, hermetically sealed,

> "Free from the Sirian star and the dread thunder-stroke"—

whose mealy coat no moth can corrupt nor blight can wither. The poet Keats had not this sort of protection for his person—he lay bare to weather—the serpent stung him, and the poison-tree dropped upon this little western flower:—when the mercenary servile crew approached him, he had no pedigree to show them, no rent-roll to hold out in reversion for their praise: he was not in any great man's train,

nor the butt and puppet of a lord—he could only offer them "the fairest flowers of the season, carnations and streaked gilliflowers,"—"rue for remembrance and pansies for thoughts"—they recked not of his gifts, but tore him with hideous shouts and laughter,

"Nor could the Muse protect her son!"

Unless an author has an establishment of his own, or is entered on that of some other person, he will hardly be allowed to write English or to spell his own name. To be well spoken of, he must enlist under some standard; he must belong to some *coterie*. He must get the *esprit de corps* on his side: he must have literary bail in readiness. Thus they prop one another's rickety heads at Murray's shop, and a spurious reputation, like false argument, runs in a circle. Croker affirms that Gifford is sprightly, and Gifford that Croker is genteel: D'Israeli that Jacob is wise, and Jacob that D'Israeli is good-natured. A Member of Parliament must be answerable that you are not dangerous or dull before you can be of the *entrée*. You must commence toad-eater to have your observations attended to; if you are independent, unconnected, you will be regarded as a poor creature. Your opinion is honest, you will say: then ten to one, it is not profitable. It is at any rate your own. So much the worse; for then it is not the

world's. Tom Hill is a very tolerable barometer in this respect. He knows nothing, hears everything, and repeats just what he hears; so that you may guess pretty well from this round-faced echo what is said by others! Almost everything goes by presumption and appearances. "Did you not think Mr B——'s language very elegant?"—I thought he bowed very low. "Did you not think him remarkably well-behaved?"—He was unexceptionably dressed. "But were not Mr C——'s manners quite insinuating?"—He said nothing. "You will at least allow his friend to be a well-informed man?"—He talked upon all subjects alike. Such would be a pretty faithful interpretation of the tone of what is called *good society*. The surface is everything: we do not pierce to the core. The setting is more valuable than the jewel. Is it not so in other things as well as letters? Is not an R.A. by the supposition a greater man in his profession than any one who is not so blazoned? Compared with that unrivalled list, Raphael had been illegitimate, Claude not classical, and Michael Angelo admitted by special favour. What is a physician without a diploma? An alderman without being knighted? An actor whose name does not appear in great letters? All others are counterfeits—men "of no mark or likelihood." This was what made the Jackals of the north so eager to prove that

I had been turned out of the Edinburgh Review. It was not the merit of the articles which excited their spleen—but their being there. Of the style they knew nothing; for the thought they cared nothing:—all that they knew was that I wrote in that powerful journal, and therefore they asserted that I did not!

We find a class of persons who labour under an obvious natural inaptitude for whatever they aspire to. Their manner of setting about it is a virtual disqualification. The simple affirmation—"What this man has said, I will do,"—is not always considered as the proper test of capacity. On the contrary, there are people whose bare pretensions are as good or better than the actual performance of others. What I myself have done, for instance, I never find admitted as proof of what I shall be able to do: whereas I observe others who bring as proof of their confidence to any task (and are taken at their word) what they have never done, and who gravely assure those who are inclined to trust them that their talents are exactly fitted for some posts because they are just the reverse of what they have ever shown them to be. One man has the air of an Editor as much as another has that of a butler or porter in a gentleman's family. —— is the model of this character, with a prodigious look of business, an air of suspicion which passes for sagacity, and an air

of deliberation which passes for judgment. If his own talents are no ways prominent, it is inferred he will be more impartial and in earnest in making use of those of others. There is Britton, the responsible conductor of several works of taste and erudition, yet (God knows) without an idea in his head relating to any one of them. He is learned by proxy, and successful from sheer imbecility. If he were to get the smallest smattering of the departments which are under his control, he would betray himself from his desire to shine; but as it is, he leaves others to do all the drudgery for him. He signs his name in the title-page or at the bottom of a vignette, and nobody suspects any mistake. This contractor for useful and ornamental literature once offered me Two Guineas for a 'Life and Character of Shakespear,' with an admission to his *conversazionés*. I went once. There was a collection of learned lumber, of antiquaries, lexicographers, and other Illustrious Obscure, and I had given up the day for lost, when in dropped Jack Taylor, of the Sun—(Who would dare to deny that he was "the Sun of our table?")—and I had nothing now to do but hear and laugh. Mr Taylor knows most of the good things that have been said in the metropolis for the last thirty years, and is in particular an excellent retailer of the humours and extravagances of his old friend

Peter Pindar. He had recounted a series of them, each rising above the other in a sort of magnificent burlesque and want of literal preciseness, to a medley of laughing and sour faces, when on his proceeding to state a joke of a practical nature by the said Peter, a Mr —— (I forget the name) objected to the moral of the story, and to the whole texture of Mr Taylor's *facetiæ*—upon which our host, who had till now supposed that all was going on swimmingly, thought it time to interfere and give a turn to the conversation by saying—"Why yes, Gentlemen, what we have hitherto heard fall from the lips of our friend has been no doubt entertaining and highly agreeable in its way: but perhaps we have had enough of what is altogether delightful and pleasant, and light and laughable in conduct. Suppose, therefore, we were to shift the subject, and talk of what is serious and moral, and industrious and laudable in character—Let us talk of Mr Tomkins the Penman!"—This staggered the gravest of us, broke up our dinner-party, and we went up stairs to tea. So much for the didactic vein of one of our principal guides in the embellished walks of modern taste, and master-manufacturers of letters. He had found that gravity had been a never-failing resource when taken at a pinch—for once the joke miscarried—and Mr Tomkins the Penman

figures to this day nowhere but in Sir Joshua's picture of him!

To complete the natural Aristocracy of Letters, we only want a Royal Society of Authors!

ESSAY III.

ON CRITICISM.

CRITICISM is an art that undergoes a great variety of changes, and aims at different objects at different times.

At first, it is generally satisfied to give an opinion whether a work is good or bad, and to quote a passage or two in support of this opinion: afterwards, it is bound to assign the reasons of its decision, and to analyse supposed beauties or defects with microscopic minuteness. A critic does nothing now-a-days who does not try to torture the most obvious expression into a thousand meanings, and enter into a circuitous explanation of all that can be urged for or against its being in the best or worst style possible. His object, indeed, is not to do justice to his author, whom he treats with very little ceremony, but to do himself homage, and to show his acquaintance with all the topics and resources of criticism. If he recurs to the stipulated subject in the end, it is not till after

he has exhausted his budget of general knowledge; and he establishes his own claims first in an elaborate inaugural dissertation *de omni scibile et quibusdum aliis*, before he deigns to bring forward the pretensions of the original candidate for praise, who is only the second figure in the piece. We may sometimes see articles of this sort, in which no allusion whatever is made to the work under sentence of death, after the first announcement of the title-page; and I apprehend it would be a clear improvement on this species of nominal criticism, to give stated periodical accounts of works that have never appeared at all, which would save the hapless author the mortification of writing, and his reviewer the trouble of reading them. If the real author is made of so little account by the modern critic, he is scarcely more an object of regard to the modern reader; and it must be confessed that after a dozen close-packed pages of subtle metaphysical distinction or solemn didactic declamation, in which the disembodied principles of all arts and sciences float before the imagination in undefined profusion, the eye turns with impatience and indifference to the imperfect embryo specimens of them, and the hopeless attempts to realise this splendid jargon in one poor work by one poor author, which is given up to summary execution with as little justice as

pity. "As when a well-graced actor leaves the stage, men's eyes are idly bent on him that enters next"—so it is here.—Whether this state of the press is not a serious abuse and a violent encroachment in the republic of letters, is more than I shall pretend to determine. The truth is, that in the quantity of works that issue from the press, it is utterly impossible they should all be read by all sorts of people. There must be *tasters* for the public, who must have a discretionary power vested in them, for which it is difficult to make them properly accountable. Authors in proportion to their numbers become not formidable, but despicable. They would not be heard of or severed from the crowd without the critic's aid, and all complaints of ill-treatment are vain. He considers them as pensioners on his bounty for any pittance of praise, and in general sets them up as butts for his wit and spleen, or uses them as a stalking-horse to convey his own favourite notions and opinions, which he can do by this means without the possibility of censure or appeal. He looks upon his literary *protegé* (much as Peter Pounce looked upon Parson Adams) as a kind of humble companion or unnecessary interloper in the vehicle of fame, whom he has taken up purely to oblige him, and whom he may treat with neglect or insult, or set down in the common foot-path, whenever it suits his humour or con-

venience. He naturally grows arbitrary with the exercise of power. He by degrees wants to have a clear stage to himself, and would be thought to have purchased a monopoly of wit, learning, and wisdom—

> "Assumes the rod, affects the God,
> And seems to shake the spheres."

Besides, something of this overbearing manner goes a great way with the public. They cannot exactly tell whether you are right or wrong; and if you state your difficulties or pay much deference to the sentiments of others, they will think you a very silly fellow or a mere pretender. A sweeping, unqualified assertion ends all controversy, and sets opinion at rest. A sharp, sententious, cavalier, dogmatical tone is therefore necessary, even in self-defence, to the office of a reviewer. If you do not deliver your oracles without hesitation, how are the world to receive them on trust and without inquiry? People read to have something to talk about, and "to seem to know that which they do not." Consequently, there cannot be too much dialectics and debateable matter, too much pomp and paradox in a review. *To elevate and surprise* is the great rule for producing a dramatic or a critical effect. The more you startle the reader, the more he will be able to startle others with a succession of smart intellectual shocks. The most of our admired re-

views is saturated with this sort of electrical matter, which is regularly played off so as to produce a good deal of astonishment and a strong sensation in the public mind. The intrinsic merits of an author are a question of very subordinate consideration to the keeping up the character of the work and supplying the town with a sufficient number of grave or brilliant topics for the consumption of the next three months!

This decided and paramount tone in criticism is the growth of the present century, and was not at all the fashion in that calm, peaceable period when the 'Monthly Review' bore "sole sovereign sway and masterdom" over all literary productions. Though nothing can be said against the respectability or usefulness of that publication during its long and almost exclusive enjoyment of the public favour, yet the style of criticism adopted in it is such as to appear slight and unsatisfactory to a modern reader. The writers, instead of "outdoing termagant or out-Heroding Herod," were somewhat precise and prudish, gentle almost to a fault, full of candour and modesty,

"And of their port as meek as is a maid!"*

* A Mr Rose and the Rev. Dr Kippis were for many years its principal support. Mrs Rose (I have heard my father say) contributed the Monthly Catalogue.

There was none of that Drawcansir work going on then that there is now; no scalping of authors, no hacking and hewing of their Lives and Opinions, except that they used those of Tristam Shandy, GENT. rather scurvily; which was to be expected. All, however, had a show of courtesy and good manners. The satire was covered and artfully insinuated; the praise was short and sweet. We met with no oracular theories; no profound analysis of principles; no unsparing exposure of the least discernible deviation from them. It was deemed sufficient to recommend the work in general terms, "This is an agreeable volume," or "This is a work of great learning and research," to set forth the title and table of contents, and proceed without farther preface to some appropriate extracts, for the most part concurring in opinion with the author's text, but now and then interposing an objection to maintain appearances and assert the jurisdiction of the court. This cursory manner of hinting approbation or dissent would make but a lame figure at present. We must have not only an announcement that "This is an agreeable or able work," but we must have

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There is sometimes a certain tartness and the woman's tongue in it. It is said of Gray's Elegy—"This little poem, however humble its pretensions, is not without elegance or merit." The characters of prophet and critic are not always united.

it explained at full length, and so as to silence all cavillers, in what the agreeableness or ability of the work consists: the author must be reduced to a class, all the living or defunct examples of which must be characteristically and pointedly *differenced* from one another; the value of this class of writing must be developed and ascertained in comparison with others; the principles of taste, the elements of our sensations, the structure of the human faculties, all must undergo a strict scrutiny and revision. The modern or metaphysical system of criticisim, in short, supposes the question, *Why?* to be repeated at the end of every decision; and the answer gives birth to interminable arguments and discussion. The former laconic mode was well adapted to guide those who merely wanted to be informed of the character and subject of a work in order to read it: the present is more useful to those whose object is less to read the work than to dispute upon its merits, and go into company clad in the whole defensive and offensive armour of criticism.

Neither are we less removed at present from the dry and meagre mode of dissecting the skeletons of works, instead of transfusing their living principles, which prevailed in 'Dryden's Prefaces,' * and in the criticisms written on the

* There are some splendid exceptions to this censure. His comparison between Ovid and Virgil, and his character of Shakespear, are master-pieces of their kind.

model of the French school about a century ago. A genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work:—here we have nothing but its superficial plan and elevation, as if a poem were a piece of formal architecture. We are told something of the plot or fable, of the moral, and of the observance or violation of the three unities of time, place, and action; and perhaps a word or two is added on the dignity of the persons or the baldness of the style: but we no more know, after reading one of these complacent *tirades*, what the essence of the work is, what passion has been touched, or how skilfully, what tone and movement the author's mind imparts to his subject or receives from it, than if we had been reading a homily or a gazette. That is, we are left quite in the dark as to the feelings of pleasure or pain to be derived from the genius of the performance or the manner to which it appeals to the imagination: we know to a nicety how it squares with the thread-bare rules of composition, not in the least how it affects the principles of taste. We know everything about the work, and nothing of it. The critic takes good care not to baulk the reader's fancy by anticipating the effect which the author has aimed at producing. To be sure, the works so handled were often worthy of their commentators: they had the form of imagination without the life of power;

and when any one had gone regularly through the number of acts into which they were divided, the measure in which they were written, or the story on which they were founded, there was little else to be said about them. It is curious to observe the effect which the 'Paradise Lost' had on this class of critics, like throwing a tub to a whale: they could make nothing of it. "It was out of all plumb—not one of the angles at the four corners was a right angle!" They did not seek for, nor would they much relish, the marrow of poetry it contained. Like polemics in religion, they had discarded the essentials of fine writing for the outward form and points of controversy. They were at issue with Genius and Nature by what route and in what garb they should enter the Temple of the Muses. Accordingly we find that Dryden had no other way of satisfying himself of the pretensions of Milton in the epic style but by translating his anomalous work into rhyme and dramatic dialogue.*—So there are connoisseurs who give

* We have critics in the present day who cannot tell what to make of the tragic writers of Queen Elizabeth's age (except Shakespear, who passes by prescriptive right), and are extremely puzzled to reduce the efforts of their "great and irregular" power to the standard of their own slight and showy common-places. The truth is, they had better give up the attempt to reconcile such contradictions as an artificial taste and natural

you the subject, the grouping, the perspective, and all the mechanical circumstances of a picture, but never say a word about the expression. The reason is, they see the former, but not the latter. There are persons, however, who cannot employ themselves better than in taking an inventory of works of art (they want a faculty for higher studies), as there are works of art, so called, which seem to have been composed expressly with an eye to such a class of connoisseurs. In them are to be found no recondite nameless beauties thrown away upon the stupid vulgar gaze; no "graces snatched beyond the reach of art;" nothing but what the merest pretender may note down in good set terms in his common-place book, just as it is before him. Place one of these half-informed, imperfectly-organized spectators before a tall canvas with groups on groups of figures, of the size of life, and engaged in a complicated action, of which they know the name and all the particulars, and there are no bounds to their burst of involuntary enthusiasm. They mount on the stilts

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genius; and repose on the admiration of verses which derive their odour from the scent of rose-leaves inserted between the pages, and their polish from the smoothness of the paper on which they are printed. They, and such writers as Deckar and Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford and Marlowe, move in different orbits of the human intellect, and need never jostle.

of the subject and ascend the highest Heaven of Invention, from whence they see sights and hear revelations which they communicate with all the fervour of plenary explanation to those who may be disposed to attend to their raptures. They float with wings expanded in lofty circles, they stalk over the canvas at large strides, never condescending to pause at anything of less magnitude than a group or a colossal figure. The face forms no part of their collective inquiries; or so that it occupies only a sixth or an eighth proportion to the whole body, all is according to the received rules of composition. Point to a divine portrait of Titian, to an angelic head of Guido, close by—they see and heed it not. What are the "looks commercing with the skies," the soul speaking in the face, to them? It asks another and an inner sense to comprehend them; but for the trigonometry of painting, nature has constituted them indifferently well. They take a stand on the distinction between portrait and history, and there they are spell-bound. Tell them that there can be no fine history without portraiture, that the painter must proceed from that ground to the one above it, and that a hundred bad heads cannot make one good historical picture, and they will not believe you, though the thing is obvious to any gross capacity. Their ideas always fly to the circumference, and never fix at the centre.

Art must be on a grand scale; according to them, the whole is greater than a part, and the greater necessarily implies the less. The outline is in this view of the matter the same thing as the filling-up, and "the limbs and flourishes of a discourse" the substance. Again, the same persons make an absolute distinction, without knowing why, between high and low subjects. Say that you would as soon have Murillo's *Two Beggar-Boys* at the Dulwich Gallery as almost any picture in the world, that is, that it would be one you would chuse out of ten (had you the choice), and they reiterate upon you, that surely a low subject cannot be of equal value with a high one. It is in vain that you turn to the picture: they keep to the class. They have eyes, but see not; and upon their principles of refined taste, would be just as good judges of the merit of the picture without seeing it as with that supposed advantage. They know what the subject is *from the catalogue!*—Yet it is not true, as Lord Byron asserts, that execution is everything, and the class or subject nothing. The highest subjects, equally well-executed (which, however, rarely happens), are the best. But the power of execution, the manner of seeing nature, is one thing, and may be so superlative (if you are only able to judge of it) as to countervail every disadvantage of subject. Raphael's storks in the Miraculous

Draught of Fishes, exulting in the event, are finer than the head of Christ would have been in almost any other hands. The cant of criticism is on the other side of the question; because execution depends on various degrees of power in the artist, and a knowledge of it on various degrees of feeling and discrimination in you: but to commence artist or connoisseur in the grand style at once, without any distinction of qualifications whatever, it is only necessary for the first to choose his subject, and for the last to pin his faith on the sublimity of the performance, for both to look down with ineffable contempt on the painters and admirers of subjects of low life. I remember a young Scotchman once trying to prove to me that Mrs Dickons was a superior singer to Miss Stephens, because the former excelled in sacred music, and the latter did not. At that rate, that is, if it is the singing sacred music that gives the preference, Miss Stephens would only have to sing sacred music to surpass herself and vie with the pretended rival; for this theory implies that all sacred music is equally good, and therefore better than any other. I grant that Madame Catalani's singing of sacred music is superior to Miss Stephens's ballad-strains, because her singing is better altogether, and an ocean of sound more wonderful than a simple stream of dulcet harmonies. In singing the last verse of "God

save the King" not long ago, her voice towered above the whole confused noise of the orchestra, like an eagle piercing the clouds, and poured "such sweet thunder" through the ear, as excited equal astonishment and rapture!

Some kinds of criticism are as much too insipid as others are too pragmatical. It is not easy to combine point with solidity, spirit with moderation and candour. Many persons see nothing but beauties in a work, others nothing but defects. Those cloy you with sweets, and are "the very milk of human kindness," flowing on in a stream of luscious panegyrics; these take delight in poisoning the sources of your satisfaction, and putting you out of conceit with nearly every author that comes in their way. The first are frequently actuated by personal friendship, the last by all the virulence of party-spirit. Under the latter head would fall what may be termed *political criticism.* The basis of this style of writing is a *caput mortuum* of impotent spite and dulness, till it is varnished over with the slime of servility, and thrown into a state of unnatural activity by the venom of the most rancorous bigotry. The eminent professors in this grovelling department are at first merely out of sorts with themselves, and vent their spleen in little interjections and contortions of phrase:—cry *Pish* at a lucky hit, and *Hem* at a fault—are smart on personal de-

fects, and sneer at "Beauty out of favour and on crutches"—are thrown into an ague-fit by hearing the name of a rival—start back with horror at any approach to their morbid pretensions, like Justice Woodcock with his gouty limbs—rifle the flowers of the Della Cruscan school, and give you in their stead, as models of a pleasing pastoral style, Verses upon Anna —which you may see in the notes to the Baviad and Mæviad. All this is like the fable of the *Kitten and the Leaves.* But when they get their brass collar on and shake their bells of office, they set up their backs like the Great Cat Rodilardus, and pounce upon men and things. Woe to any little heedless reptile of an author that ventures across their path without a safe-conduct from the Board of Controul. They snap him up at a mouthful, and sit licking their lips, stroking their whiskers, and rattling their bells over the imaginary fragments of their devoted prey, to the alarm and astonishment of the whole breed of literary, philosophical, and revolutionary vermin, that were naturalised in this country by a Prince of Orange and an Elector of Hanover a hundred years ago.* When one of these pampered, sleek, "demure-

* The intelligent reader will be pleased to understand, that there is here a tacit allusion to Squire Western's significant phrase of *Hanover Rats.*

looking, spring-nailed, velvet-pawed, green-eyed" critics makes his King and Country parties to this sort of sport literary, you have not much chance of escaping out of his clutches in a whole skin. Treachery becomes a principle with them, and mischief a conscience, that is, a livelihood. They not only *damn* the work in the lump, but vilify and traduce the author, and substitute lying abuse and sheer malignity for sense and satire. To have written a popular work is as much as a man's character is worth, and sometimes his life, if he does not happen to be on the right side of the question. The way in which they set about *stultifying* an adversary is not to accuse you of faults, or to exaggerate those which you may really have, but they deny that you have any merits at all, least of all, those that the world have given you credit for; bless themselves from understanding a single sentence in a whole volume; and unless you are ready to subscribe to all their articles of peace, will not allow you to be qualified to write your own name. It is not a question of literary discussion, but of political proscription. It is a mark of loyalty and patriotism to extend no quarter to those of the opposite party. Instead of replying to your arguments, they call you names, put words and opinions into your mouth which you have never uttered, and consider it a species of misprision of

treason to admit that a Whig author knows anything of common sense or English. The only chance of putting a stop to this unfair mode of dealing would perhaps be to make a few reprisals by way of example. The Court party boast some writers who have a reputation to lose, and who would not like to have their names dragged through the kennel of dirty abuse and vulgar obloquy. What silenced the masked battery of Blackwood's Magazine was the implication of the name of Sir Walter Scott in some remarks upon it—(an honour of which it seems that extraordinary person was not ambitious)—to be "pilloried on infamy's high stage" was a distinction and an amusement to the other gentlemen concerned in that praiseworthy publication. I was complaining not long ago of this prostitution of literary criticism as peculiar to our own times, when I was told that it was just as bad in the time of Pope and Dryden, and indeed worse, inasmuch as we have no Popes or Drydens now on the obnoxious side to be nicknamed, metamorphosed into scarecrows, and impaled alive by bigots and dunces. I shall not pretend to say how far this remark may be true. The English (it must be owned) are rather a foul-mouthed nation.

Besides temporary or accidental biases of this kind, there seem to be sects and parties in taste and criticism (with a set of appropriate watch-

words) coeval with the arts of composition, and that will last as long as the difference with which men's minds are originally constituted. There are some who are all for the elegance of an author's style, and some who are equally delighted with simplicity. The last refer you to Swift as a model of English prose—thinking all other writers sophisticated and naught—the former prefer the more ornamented and sparkling periods of Junius or Gibbon. It is to no purpose to think of bringing about an understanding between these opposite factions. It is a natural difference of temperament and constitution of mind. The one will never relish the antithetical point and perpetual glitter of the artificial prose-style; as the plain unperverted English idiom will always appear trite and insipid to the others. A toleration, not an uniformity of opinion, is as much as can be expected in this case: and both sides may acknowledge, without imputation on their taste or consistency, that these different writers excelled each in their way. I might remark here that the epithet *elegant* is very sparingly used in modern criticism. It has probably gone out of fashion with the appearance of the *Lake School*, who, I apprehend, have no such phrase in their vocabulary. Mr Rogers was, I think, almost the last poet to whom it was applied as a characteristic compliment. At present it would be considered as

a sort of diminutive of the title of poet, like the terms *pretty* or *fanciful*, and is banished from the *haut ton* of letters. It may perhaps come into request at some future period.—Again, the dispute between the admirers of Homer and Virgil has never been settled, and never will; for there will always be minds to whom the excellences of Virgil will be more congenial, and therefore more objects of admiration and delight, than those of Homer, and *vice versâ*. Both are right in preferring what suits them best, the delicacy and selectness of the one, or the fulness and majestic flow of the other. There is the same difference in their tastes that there was in the genius of their two favourites. Neither can the disagreement between the French and English school of tragedy ever be reconciled, till the French become English, or the English French.* Both are right in what they admire, both are wrong in condemning the others for what they admire. We see the defects of Racine, they see the faults of Shakespear, probably in an exaggerated point of view. But we may be sure of this, that when we see nothing but grossness and barbarism, or insipidity and verbiage, in a writer that is the

* Of the two the latter alternative is more likely to happen. We abuse and imitate them. They laugh at but do not imitate us.

God of a nation's idolatry, it is we and not they who want true taste and feeling. The controversy about Pope and the opposite school in our own poetry comes to much the same thing. Pope's correctness, smoothness, &c., are very good things and much to be commended in him. But it is not to be expected or even desired that others should have these qualities in the same paramount degree, to the exclusion of everything else. If you like correctness and smoothness of all things in the world, there they are for you in Pope. If you like other things better, such as strength and sublimity, you know where to go for them. Why trouble Pope or any other author for what they have not, and do not profess to give? Those who seem to imply that Pope possessed, besides his own peculiar, exquisite merits, all that is to be found in Shakespear or Milton, are I should hardly think in good earnest. But I do not therefore see that, because this was not the case, Pope was no poet. We cannot by a little verbal sophistry confound the qualities of different minds, nor force opposite excellences into a union by all the intolerance in the world. We may pull Pope in pieces as long as we please, for not being Shakespear or Milton, as we may carp at them for not being Pope: but this will not make a poet equal to all three. If we have a taste for some one precise style or

manner, we may keep it to ourselves and let others have theirs. If we are more catholic in our notions, and want variety of excellence and beauty, it is spread abroad for us to profusion in the variety of books and in the several growth of men's minds, fettered by no capricious or arbitrary rules. Those who would proscribe whatever falls short of a given standard of imaginary perfection, do so not from a higher capacity of taste or range of intellect than others, but to destroy, to "crib and cabin in," all enjoyments and opinions but their own.

We find people of a decided and original, and others of a more general and versatile taste. I have sometimes thought that the most acute and original-minded men made bad critics. They see everything too much through a particular medium. What does not fall in with their own bias and mode of composition, strikes them as common-place and factitious. What does not come into the direct line of their vision, they regard idly, with vacant, "lack-lustre eye." The extreme force of their original impressions, compared with the feebleness of those they receive at second-hand from others, oversets the balance and just proportion of their minds. Men who have fewer native resources, and are obliged to apply oftener to the general stock, acquire by habit a greater aptitude in appreciating what they owe to others. Their

taste is not made a sacrifice to their egotism and vanity, and they enrich the soil of their minds with continual accessions of borrowed strength and beauty. I might take this opportunity of observing, that the person of the most refined and least contracted taste I ever knew was the late Joseph Fawcett, the friend of my youth. He was almost the first literary acquaintance I ever made, and I think the most candid and unsophisticated. He had a masterly perception of all styles and of every kind and degree of excellence, sublime or beautiful, from Milton's Paradise Lost to Shenstone's Pastoral Ballad, from Butler's Analogy down to Humphry Clinker. If you had a favourite author, he had read him too, and knew all the best morsels, the subtile *traits*, the capital touches. "Do you like Sterne?"—"Yes, to be sure," he would say, "I should deserve to be hanged, if I didn't!" His repeating some parts of Comus with his fine, deep, mellow-toned voice, particularly the lines, "I have heard my mother Circe with the Sirens three," &c.—and the enthusiastic comments he made afterwards, were a feast to the ear and to the soul. He read the poetry of Milton with the same fervour and spirit of devotion that I have since heard others read their own. "That is the most delicious feeling of all," I have heard him exclaim, "to like what is excellent, no matter whose it is." In this

respect he practised what he preached. He was incapable of harbouring a sinister motive, and judged only from what he felt. There was no flaw or mist in the clear mirror of his mind. He was as open to impressions as he was strenuous in maintaining them. He did not care a rush whether a writer was old or new, in prose or in verse—"What he wanted," he said, "was something to make him think." Most men's minds are to me like musical instruments out of tune. Touch a particular key, and it jars and makes harsh discord with your own. They like Gil Blas, but can see nothing to laugh at in Don Quixote: they adore Richardson, but are disgusted with Fielding. Fawcett had a taste accommodated to all these. He was not exceptious. He gave a cordial welcome to all sorts, provided they were the best in their kind. He was not fond of counterfeits or duplicates. His own style was laboured and artificial to a fault, while his character was frank and ingenuous in the extreme. He was not the only individual whom I have known to counteract their natural disposition in coming before the public, and by avoiding what they perhaps thought an inherent infirmity, debar themselves of their real strength and advantages. A heartier friend or honester critic I never coped withal. He has made me feel (by contrast) the want of genuine sincerity and generous sentiment in

some that I have listened to since, and convinced me (if practical proof were wanting) of the truth of that text of Scripture—"That had I all knowledge, and could speak with the tongues of angels, yet without charity I were nothing!" I would rather be a man of disinterested taste and liberal feeling, to see and acknowledge truth and beauty wherever I found it, than a man of greater and more original genius, to hate, envy, and deny all excellence but my own—but that poor scanty pittance of it (compared with the whole) which I had myself produced!

There is another race of critics who might be designated as the *Occult School—verè adepti.* They discern no beauties but what are concealed from superficial eyes, and overlook all that are obvious to the vulgar part of mankind. Their art is the transmutation of styles. By happy alchemy of mind they convert dross into gold—and gold into tinsel. They see farther into a millstone than most others. If an author is utterly unreadable, they can read him for ever; his intricacies are their delight, his mysteries are their study. They prefer Sir Thomas Brown to the Rambler by Dr Johnson, and Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy to all the writers of the Georgian Age. They judge of works of genius as misers do of hid treasure—it is of no value unless they have it all to themselves. They will no

more share a book than a mistress with a friend. If they suspected their favourite volumes of delighting any eyes but their own, they would immediately discard them from the list. Theirs are superannuated beauties that every one else has left off intriguing with, bed-ridden hags, a "stud of night-mares." This is not envy or affectation, but a natural proneness to singularity, a love of what is odd and out of the way. They must come at their pleasure with difficulty, and support admiration by an uneasy sense of ridicule and opposition. They despise those qualities in a work which are cheap and obvious. They like a monopoly of taste, and are shocked at the prostitution of intellect implied in popular productions. In like manner, they would choose a friend or recommend a mistress for gross defects; and tolerate the sweetness of an actress's voice only for the ugliness of her face. Pure pleasures are in their judgment cloying and insipid—

"An ounce of sour is worth a pound of sweet!"

Nothing goes down with them but what is *caviare* to the multitude. They are eaters of olives and readers of black-letter. Yet they smack of genius, and would be worth any money, were it only for the rarity of the thing!

The last sort I shall mention are *verbal critics* —mere word-catchers, fellows that pick out a

word in a sentence and a sentence in a volume, and tell you it is wrong.* These erudite persons constantly find out by anticipation that you are deficient in the smallest things—that you cannot spell certain words, or join the nominative case and the verb together, because to do this is the height of their own ambition, and of course they must set you down lower than their opinion of themselves. They degrade by reducing you to their own standard of merit; for the qualifications they deny you, or the faults they object are so very insignificant, that to prove yourself possessed of the one or free from the other, is to make yourself doubly ridiculous. Littleness is their element, and they give a character of meanness to whatever they touch. They creep, buzz, and fly-blow. It is much easier to crush than to catch these troublesome insects; and when they are in your power, your self-respect spares them. The race is almost extinct:—one or two of them are sometimes seen crawling over the pages of the Quarterly Review!

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* The title of *Ultra-Crepidarian critics* has been given to a variety of this species.

ESSAY IV.

ON GREAT AND LITTLE THINGS.

"These little things are great to little men.
GOLDSMITH.

THE great and the little have, no doubt, a real existence in the nature of things: but they both find pretty much the same level in the mind of man. It is a common measure, which does not always accommodate itself to the size and importance of the objects it represents. It has a certain interest to spare for certain things (and no more) according to its humour and capacity; and neither likes to be stinted in its allowance, nor to muster up an unusual share of sympathy, just as the occasion may require. Perhaps if we could recollect distinctly, we should discover that the two things that have affected us most in the course of our lives have been, one of them of the greatest, and the other of the smallest possible consequence. To let that pass as too fine a speculation, we know well enough that very trifling circumstances do give us great and daily annoyance, and as often prove too much for our philosophy and forbearance, as matters of the

highest moment. A lump of soot spoiling a man's dinner, a plate of toast falling in the ashes, the being disappointed of a ribbon to a cap or a ticket to a ball, have led to serious and almost tragical consequences. Friends not unfrequently fall out and never meet again for some idle misunderstanding, "some trick not worth an egg," who have stood the shock of serious differences of opinion and clashing interests in life; and there is an excellent paper in the Tattler, to prove that if a married couple do not quarrel about some point in the first instance not worth contesting, they will seldom find an opportunity afterwards to quarrel about a question of real importance. Grave divines, great statesmen, and deep philosophers are put out of their way by very little things: nay, discreet, worthy people, without any pretensions but to good-nature and common sense, readily surrender the happiness of their whole lives sooner than give up an opinion to which they have committed themselves, though in all likelihood it was the mere turn of a feather which side they should take in the argument. It is the being baulked or thwarted in anything that constitutes the grievance, the unpardonable affront, not the value of the thing to which we had made up our minds. Is it that we despise little things; that we are not prepared for them; that they take us in our careless, unguarded

moments, and tease us out of our ordinary patience by their petty, incessant, insect warfare, buzzing about us and stinging us like gnats; so that we can neither get rid of nor grapple with them, whereas we collect all our fortitude and resolution to meet evils of greater magnitude? Or is it that there is a certain stream of irritability that is continually fretting upon the wheels of life, which finds sufficient food to play with in straws and feathers, while great objects are too much for it, either choke it up, or divert its course into serious and thoughtful interest? Some attempt might be made to explain this in the following manner.

One is always more vexed at losing a game of any sort by a single hole or ace, than if one has never had a chance of winning it. This is no doubt in part or chiefly because the prospect of success irritates the subsequent disappointment. But people have been known to pine and fall sick from holding the next number to the twenty thousand pound prize in the lottery. Now this could only arise from their being so near winning in fancy, from there seeming to be so thin a partition between them and success. When they were within one of the right number, why could they not have taken the next—it was so easy: this haunts their minds and will not let them rest, notwithstanding the absurdity of the reasoning. It is that the will here has a

slight imaginary obstacle to surmount to attain its end; it should appear it had only an exceedingly trifling effort to make for this purpose, that it was absolutely in its power (had it known) to seize the envied prize, and it is continually harassing itself by making the obvious transition from one number to the other, when it is too late. That is to say, the will acts in proportion to its fancied power, to its superiority over immediate obstacles. Now in little or indifferent matters there seems no reason why it should not have its own way, and therefore a disappointment vexes it the more. It grows angry according to the insignificance of the occasion, and frets itself to death about an object, merely because from its very futility there can be supposed to be no real difficulty in the way of its attainment, nor anything more required for this purpose than a determination of the will. The being baulked of this throws the mind off its balance, or puts it into what is called *a passion;* and as nothing but an act of voluntary power still seems necessary to get rid of every impediment, we indulge our violence more and more, and heighten our impatience by degrees into a sort of frenzy. The object is the same as it was, but we are no longer as we were. The blood is heated, the muscles are strained. The feelings are wound up to a pitch of agony with the vain strife. The temper is tried to the

utmost it will bear. The more contemptible the object or the obstructions in the way to it, the more are we provoked at being hindered by them. It looks like witchcraft. We fancy there is a spell upon us, so that we are hampered by straws and entangled in cobwebs. We believe that there is a fatality about our affairs. It is evidently on purpose to plague us. A demon is at our elbow to torment and defeat us in everything, even in the smallest things. We see him sitting and mocking us, and we rave and gnash our teeth at him in return. It is particularly hard that we cannot succeed in any one point, however trifling, that we set our hearts on. We are the sport of imbecility and mischance. We make another desperate effort, and fly out into all the extravagance of impotent rage once more. Our anger runs away with our reason, because, as there is little to give it birth, there is nothing to check it or recal us to our senses in the prospect of consequences. We take up and rend in pieces the mere toys of humour, as the gusts of wind take up and whirl about chaff and stubble. Passion plays the tyrant, in a grand tragic-comic style, over the Lilliputian difficulties and petty disappointments it has to encounter, gives way to all the fretfulness of grief and all the turbulence of resentment, makes a fuss about nothing because there is nothing to make a fuss about—when an impending

calamity, an irretrievable loss, would instantly bring it to its recollection, and tame it in its preposterous career. A man may be in a great passion and give himself strange airs at so simple a thing as a game at ball, for instance; may rage like a wild beast, and be ready to dash his head against the wall about nothing, or about that which he will laugh at the next minute, and think no more of ten minutes after, at the same time that a good smart blow from the ball, the effects of which he might feel as a serious inconvenience for a month, would calm him directly—

> "Anon as patient as the female dove,
> His silence will sit drooping."

The truth is, we pamper little griefs into great ones, and bear great ones as well as we can. We can afford to dally and play tricks with the one, but the others we have enough to do with, without any of the wantonness and bombast of passion—without the swaggering of Pistol, or the insolence of King Cambyses' vein. To great evils we submit, we resent little provocations. I have before now been disappointed of a hundred pound job and lost half a crown at rackets on the same day, and been more mortified at the latter than the former. That which is lasting we share with the future, we defer the consideration of till to-morrow: that which belongs to the moment we drink up in all its

bitterness, before the spirit evaporates. We probe minute mischiefs to the quick: we lacerate, tear, and mangle our bosoms with misfortune's finest, brittlest point, and wreak our vengeance on ourselves and it for good and all. Small pains are more manageable, more within our reach; we can fret and worry ourselves about them, can turn them into any shape, can twist and torture them how we please:—a grain of sand in the eye, a thorn in the flesh only irritates the part, and leaves us strength enough to quarrel and get out of all patience with it:—a heavy blow stuns and takes away all power of sense as well as of resistance. The great and mighty reverses of fortune, like the revolutions of nature, may be said to carry their own weight and reason along with them: they seem unavoidable and remediless, and we submit to them without murmuring as to a fatal necessity. The magnitude of the events, in which we may happen to be concerned, fills the mind, and carries it out of itself, as it were, into the page of history. Our thoughts are expanded with the scene on which we have to act, and lend us strength to disregard our own personal share in it. Some men are indifferent to the stroke of fate, as before and after earthquakes there is a calm in the air. From the commanding situation whence they have been accustomed to view things, they look down at themselves

as only a part of the whole, and can abstract their minds from the pressure of misfortune, by the aid of its very violence. They are projected, in the explosion of events, into a different sphere, far from their former thoughts, purposes, and passions. The greatness of the change anticipates the slow effects of time and reflection:—they at once contemplate themselves from an immense distance, and look up with speculative wonder at the height on which they stood. Had the downfal been less complete, it would have been more galling and borne with less resignation, because there might still be a chance of remedying it by farther efforts and farther endurance—but past cure, past hope. It is chiefly this cause (together with something of constitutional character) which has enabled the greatest man in modern history to bear his reverses of fortune with gay magnanimity, and to submit to the loss of the empire of the world with as little discomposure as if he had been playing a game at chess.* This does not prove by our theory that he did not use to fly into violent passions with Talleyrand for plaguing him with bad news when things went wrong. He was mad at uncertain forebodings of disaster, but resigned to its consummation.

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* This Essay was written in January, 1821.

A man may dislike impertinence, yet have no quarrel with necessity!

There is another consideration that may take off our wonder at the firmness with which the principals in great vicissitudes of fortune bear their fate, which is that they are in the secret of its operations, and know that what to others appears chance-medley was unavoidable. The clearness of their perception of all the circumstances converts the uneasiness of doubt into certainty: they have not the qualms of conscience which their admirers have, who cannot tell how much of the event is to be attributed to the leaders, and how much to unforeseen accidents: they are aware either that the result was not to be helped, or that they did all they could to prevent it.

——— "Si Pergama dextra
Defendi possent, etiam hac defensa fuissent."

It is the mist and obscurity through which we view objects that makes us fancy they might have been, or might still be otherwise. The precise knowledge of antecedents and consequents makes men practical as well as philosophical Necessarians.—It is the want of this knowledge which is the principle and soul of gambling, and of games of chance or partial skill. The supposition is, that the issue is uncertain, and that there is no positive means of ascertaining it. It is dependent on the turn of

a die, on the tossing up of a halfpenny: to be fair, it must be a lottery; there is no knowing but by the event: and it is this which keeps the interest alive, and works up the passion little short of madness. There is all the agitation of suspense, all the alternation of hope and fear, of good and bad success, all the eagerness of desire, without the possibility of reducing this to calculation, that is, of subjecting the increased action of the will to a known rule, or restraining the excesses of passion within the bounds of reason. We see no cause beforehand why the run of the cards should not be in our favour:—we will hear of none afterwards why it should not have been so. As in the absence of all data to judge by, we wantonly fill up the blank with the most extravagant expectations, so, when all is over, we obstinately recur to the chance we had previously. There is nothing to tame us down to the event, nothing to reconcile us to our hard luck, for so we think it. We see no reason why we failed (and there was none, any more than why we should succeed)—we think that, reason apart, our will is the next best thing; we still try to have it our own way, and fret, torment, and harrow ourselves up with vain imaginations to effect impossibilities.*

* Losing gamesters thus become desperate, because the continued and violent irritation of the will against a

We play the game over again: we wonder how it was possible for us to fail. We turn our brain with straining at contradictions, and striving to make things what they are not, or in other words, to subject the course of nature to our fantastical wishes. "If it had been so—if we had done such and such a thing"—we try it in a thousand different ways, and are just as far off the mark as ever. We appealed to chance in the first instance, and yet, when it has decided against us, we will not give in, and sit down contented with our loss, but refuse to submit to anything but reason, which has nothing to do with the matter. In drawing two straws, for example, to see which is the longest, there was an apparent necessity we should fix upon the wrong one, it was so easy to have fixed upon the other, nay, at one time we were going to do it—if we had—the mind thus runs back to what was so possible and feasible at one time, while the thing was pending, and would fain give a bias to causes so slender and insignificant, as the skittle-player bends his body to give a bias to the bowl he has already delivered from his hand, not considering that what is once determined, be the cause ever so trivial or

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run of ill luck drives it to extremity, and makes it bid defiance to common sense and every consideration of prudence or self-interest.

evanescent, is in the individual instance unalterable. Indeed, to be a great philosopher, in the practical and most important sense of the term, little more seems necessary than to be convinced of the truth of the maxim, which the wise man repeated to the daughter of King Cophetua, "That if a thing is, it is," and there is an end of it!

We often make life unhappy in wishing things to have turned out otherwise than they did, merely because that is possible to the imagination which is impossible in fact. I remember when Lamb's farce was damned (for damned it was, that's certain) I used to dream every night for a month after (and then I vowed I would plague myself no more about it) that it was revived at one of the minor or provincial theatres with great success, that such and such retrenchments and alterations had been made in it, and that it was thought it might do at the other House. I had heard indeed (this was told in confidence to Lamb) that Gentleman Lewis was present on the night of its performance, and said that if he had had it, he would have made it, by a few judicious curtailments, "the most popular little thing that had been brought out for some time." How often did I conjure up in recollection the full diapason of applause at the end of the Prologue, and hear my ingenious friend in the first row of the pit roar with laughter at his

own wit! Then I dwelt with forced complacency on some part in which it had been doing well: then we would consider (in concert) whether the long, tedious opera of the "Travellers," which preceded it, had not tried people beforehand, so that they had not spirits left for the quaint and sparkling "wit skirmishes" of the dialogue, and we all agreed it might have gone down after a Tragedy, except Lamb himself, who swore he had no hopes of it from the beginning, and that he knew the name of the hero when it came to be discovered could not be got over.—Mr H——, thou wert damned! Bright shone the morning on the play-bills that announced thy appearance, and the streets were filled with the buzz of persons asking one another if they would go to see Mr H——, and answering that they would certainly: but before night the gaiety, not of the author but of his friends and the town, was eclipsed, for thou wert damned! Hadst thou been anonymous, thou haply might have lived. But thou didst come to an untimely end for thy tricks, and for want of a better name to pass them off!

In this manner we go back to the critical minutes on which the turn of our fate, or that of any one else in whom we are interested, depended; try them over again with new knowledge and sharpened sensibility; and thus think to alter what is irrevocable, and ease for a mo-

ment the pang of lasting regret. So in a game at rackets* (to compare small things with great) I think if at such a point I had followed up my success, if I had not been too secure or over-anxious in another part, if I had played for such an opening, in short, if I had done anything but what I did and what has proved unfortunate in the result, the chances were all in my favour. But it is merely because I do not know what would have happened in the other case, that I interpret it so readily to my own advantage. I have sometimes laid awake a whole night, trying to serve out the last ball of an interesting game in a particular corner of the court, which I had missed from a nervous feeling. Rackets (I might observe for the sake of the uninformed reader) is, like any other athletic game, very much a thing of skill and practice: but it is also a thing of opinion, "subject to all the skyey influences." If you think you can win, you can win. Faith is necessary to victory. If you hesitate in striking at the ball, it is ten to one but you miss it. If you are apprehensive of committing some particular error (such as striking the ball foul) you will

* Some of the poets in the beginning of the last century would often set out on a simile by observing—"So in Arabia have I seen a Phœnix!" I confess my illustrations are of a more homely and humble nature.

be nearly sure to do it. While thinking of that which you are so earnestly bent upon avoiding, your hand mechanically follows the strongest idea, and obeys the imagination rather than the intention of the striker. A run of luck is a fore-runner of success, and courage is as much wanted as skill. No one is however free from nervous sensations at times. A good player may not be able to strike a single stroke if another comes into the court that he has a particular dread of; and it frequently so happens that a player cannot beat another, even though he can give half the game to an equal player, because he has some associations of jealousy or personal pique against the first which he has not towards the last. *Sed hæc hactenus.* Chess is a game I do not understand, and have not comprehension enough to play at. But I believe, though it is so much less a thing of chance than science or skill, eager players pass whole nights in marching and counter-marching their men and check-mating a successful adversary, supposing that at a certain point of the game they had determined upon making a particular move instead of the one which they actually did make. I have heard a story of two persons playing at back-gammon, one of whom was so enraged at losing his match at a particular point of the game, that he took the board and threw it out of the window. It fell upon the head o

one of the passengers in the street, who came up to demand instant satisfaction for the affront and injury he had sustained. The losing gamester only asked him if he understood back-gammon, and finding that he did, said, that if upon seeing the state of the game he did not excuse the extravagance of his conduct, he would give him any other satisfaction he wished for. The tables were accordingly brought and the situation of the two contending parties being explained, the gentleman put up his sword, and went away perfectly satisfied.—To return from this, which to some will seem a digression, and to others will serve as a confirmation of the doctrine I am insisting on.

It is not then the value of the object, but the time and pains bestowed upon it, that determines the sense and degree of our loss. Many men set their minds only on trifles, and have not a compass of soul to take an interest in anything truly great and important beyond forms and minutiæ. Such persons are really men of little minds, or may be complimented with the title of great children:—

"Pleased with a feather, tickled with a straw."

Larger objects elude their grasp, while they fasten eagerly on the light and insignificant. They fidget themselves and others to death with incessant anxiety about nothing. A part of their

dress that is awry keeps them in a fever of restlessness and impatience; they sit picking their teeth, or paring their nails, or stirring the fire, or brushing a speck of dirt off their coats, while the house or the world tumbling about their ears would not rouse them from their morbid insensibility. They cannot sit still on their chairs for their lives, though, if there were anything for them to do, they would become immovable. Their nerves are as irritable as their imaginations are callous and inert. They are addicted to an inveterate habit of littleness and perversity, which rejects every other motive to action or object of contemplation but the daily, teasing, contemptible, familiar, favourite sources of uneasiness and dissatisfaction. When they are of a sanguine instead of a morbid temperament, they become quidnuncs and virtuosos—collectors of caterpillars and odd volumes, makers of fishing-rods and curious in watch-chains. Will Wimble dabbled in this way, to his immortal honour. But many others have been less successful. There are those who build their fame on epigrams or epitaphs, and others who devote their lives to writing the Lord's Prayer in little. Some poets compose and sing their own verses. Which character would they have us think most highly of—the poet or the musician? The Great is One. Some there are who feel more pride in sealing a letter with a

head of Homer than ever that old blind bard did in reciting his Iliad. These raise a huge opinion of themselves out of nothing, as there are those who shrink from their own merits into the shade of unconquerable humility. I know one person at least, who would rather be the author of an unsuccessful farce than of a successful tragedy. Repeated mortification has produced an inverted ambition in his mind, and made failure the bitter test of desert. He cannot lift his drooping head to gaze on the gaudy crown of popularity placed within his reach, but casts a pensive, riveted look downwards to the modest flowers which the multitude trample under their feet. If he had a piece likely to succeed, coming out under all advantages, he would damn it by some ill-timed, wilful jest, and lose the favour of the public, to preserve the sense of his personal identity. "Misfortune," Shakespear says, "brings a man acquainted with strange bed-fellows:" and it makes our thoughts traitors to ourselves.—It is a maxim with many—"Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves." Those only put it in practice successfully who think more of the pence than of the pounds. To such, a large sum is less than a small one. Great speculations, great returns are to them extravagant or imaginary: a few hundreds a year are something snug and com-

fortable. Persons who have been used to a petty, huckstering way of life cannot enlarge their apprehensions to a notion of anything better. Instead of launching out into greater expense and liberality with the tide of fortune, they draw back with the fear of consequences, and think to succeed on a broader scale by dint of meanness and parsimony. My uncle Toby frequently caught Trim standing up behind his chair, when he had told him to be seated. What the corporal did out of respect, others would do out of servility. The menial character does not wear out in three or four generations. You cannot keep some people out of the kitchen, merely because their grandfathers or grandmothers came out of it. A poor man and his wife walking along in the neighbourhood of Portland place, he said to her peevishly, "What is the use of walking along these fine streets and squares? Let us turn down some alley!" He felt he should be more at home there. Lamb said of an old acquaintance of his, that when he was young, he wanted to be a tailor, but had not spirit! This is the misery of unequal matches. The woman cannot easily forget, or think that others forget, her origin; and with perhaps superior sense and beauty, keeps painfully in the background. It is worse when she braves this conscious feeling, and displays all the insolence of the upstart and affected fine

lady. But should thou ever, my Infelice, grace my home with thy loved presence, as thou hast cheered my hopes with thy smile, thou wilt conquer all hearts with thy prevailing gentleness, and I will show the world what Shakespear's women were!—Some gallants set their hearts on princesses; others descend in imagination to women of quality; others are mad after opera-singers. For my part, I am shy even of actresses, and should not think of leaving my card with Madame Vestris. I am for none of these *bonnes fortunes*; but for a list of humble beauties, servant maids and shepherd girls, with their red elbows, hard hands, black stockings and mob-caps, I could furnish out a gallery equal to Cowley's, and paint them half as well. Oh! might I but attempt a description of some of them in poetic prose, Don Juan would forget his Julia, and Mr Davison might both print and publish this volume. I agree so far with Horace, and differ with Montaigne. I admire the Clementinas and Clarissas at a distance: the Pamelas and Fannys of Richardson and Fielding make my blood tingle. I have written love-letters to such in my time, "d'un pathetique à faire fendre les rochers," and with about as much effect as if they had been addressed to stone. The simpletons only laughed, and said, that "those were not the sort of things to gain the affections." I wish I had

kept copies in my own justification. What is worse, I have an utter aversion to blue-stockings. I do not care a fig for any woman that knows even what an author means. If I know that she has read anything I have written, I cut her acquaintance immediately. This sort of literary intercourse with me passes for nothing. Her critical and scientific acquirements are carrying coals to Newcastle. I do not want to be told that I have published such or such a work. I knew all this before. It makes no addition to my sense of power. I do not wish the affair to be brought about in that way. I would have her read my soul: she should understand the language of the heart: she should know what I am, as if she were another self! She should love me for myself alone. I like myself without any reason:—I would have her do so too. This is not very reasonable. I abstract from my temptations to admire all the circumstances of dress, birth, breeding, fortune; and I would not willingly put forward my own pretensions, whatever they may be. The image of some fair creature is engraven on my inmost soul; it is on that I build my claim to her regard, and expect her to see into my heart, as I see her form always before me. Wherever she treads, pale primroses, like her face, vernal hyacinths, like her brow, spring up beneath her feet, and music hangs on every bough: but all

is cold, barren, and desolate without her. Thus I feel and thus I think. But have I ever told her so? No. Or if I did, would she understand it? No. I "hunt the wind, I worship a statue, cry aloud to the desert." To see beauty is not to be beautiful, to pine in love is not to be loved again.—I always was inclined to raise and magnify the power of love. I thought that his sweet power should only be exerted to join together the loveliest forms and fondest hearts; that none but those in whom his Godhead shone outwardly, and was inly felt, should ever partake of his triumphs; and I stood and gazed at a distance, as unworthy to mingle in so bright a throng, and did not (even for a moment) wish to tarnish the glory of so fair a vision by being myself admitted into it. I say this was my notion once, but God knows it was one of the errors of my youth. For coming nearer to look, I saw the maimed, the blind, and the halt enter in, the crooked and the dwarf, the ugly, the old and impotent, the man of pleasure and the man of the world, the dapper and the pert, the vain and shallow boaster, the fool and the pedant, the ignorant and brutal, and all that is farthest removed from earth's fairest-born, and the pride of human life. Seeing all these enter the courts of Love, and thinking that I also might venture in under favour of the crowd, but finding myself rejected,

I fancied (I might be wrong) that it was not so much because I was below, as above the common standard. I did feel, but I was ashamed to feel, mortified at my repulse, when I saw the meanest of mankind, the very scum and refuse, all creeping things and every obscene creature, enter in before me. I seemed a species by myself. I took a pride even in my disgrace: and concluded I had elsewhere my inheritance! The only thing I ever piqued myself upon was the writing the 'Essay on the Principles of Human Action'—a work that no woman ever read, or would ever comprehend the meaning of. But if I do not build my claim to regard on the pretensions I have, how can I build it on those I am totally without? Or why do I complain and expect to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Thought has in me cancelled pleasure; and this dark forehead, bent upon truth, is the rock on which all affection has split. And thus I waste my life in one long sigh; nor ever (till too late) beheld a gentle face turned gently upon mine! . . . But no! not too late, if that face, pure, modest, downcast, tender, with angel sweetness, not only gladdens the prospect of the future, but sheds its radiance on the past, smiling in tears. A purple light hovers round my head. The air of love is in the room. As I look at my long-neglected copy of the 'Death of Clorinda,'

golden gleams play upon the canvas, as they used when I painted it. The flowers of Hope and Joy springing up in my mind, recal the time when they first bloomed there. The years that are fled knock at the door and enter. I am in the Louvre once more. The sun of Austerlitz has not set. It still shines here—in my heart; and he, the son of glory, is not dead, nor ever shall be, to me. I am as when my life began. The rainbow is in the sky again. I see the skirts of the departed years. All that I have thought and felt has not been in vain. I am not utterly worthless, unregarded; nor shall I die and wither of pure scorn. Now could I sit on the tomb of Liberty, and write a Hymn to Love. Oh! if I am deceived, let me be deceived still. Let me live in the Elysium of those soft looks; poison me with kisses, kill me with smiles; but still mock me with thy love!*

Poets chuse mistresses who have the fewest charms, that they may make something out of nothing. They succeed best in fiction, and they apply this rule to love. They make a Goddess of any dowdy. As Don Quixote said, in answer to the matter-of-fact remonstrances of Sancho, that Dulcinea del Toboso answered the

*I beg the reader to consider this passage merely as a specimen of the mock heroic style, and as having nothing to do with any real facts or feelings.

purpose of signalising his valour just as well as the "fairest princess under sky," so any of the fair sex will serve them to write about just as well as another. They take some awkward thing and dress her up in fine words, as children dress up a wooden doll in fine clothes. Perhaps, a fine head of hair, a taper waist, or some other circumstance strikes them, and they make the rest out according to their fancies. They have a wonderful knack of supplying deficiencies in the subjects of their idolatry out of the storehouse of their imaginations. They presently translate their favourites to the skies, where they figure with Berenice's locks and Ariadne's crown. This predilection for the unprepossessing and insignificant, I take to arise not merely from a desire in poets to have some subject to exercise their inventive talents upon, but from their jealousy of any pretensions (even those of beauty in the other sex) that might interfere with the continual incense offered to their personal vanity.

Cardinal Mazarin never thought anything of Cardinal de Retz, after he told him that he had written for the last thirty years of his life with the same pen. Some Italian poet going to present a copy of verses to the Pope, and finding, as he was looking them over in the coach as he went, a mistake of a single letter in the printing, broke his heart of vexation

and chagrin. A still more remarkable case of literary disappointment occurs in the history of a countryman of his, which I cannot refrain from giving here, as I find it related. "Anthony Codrus Urceus, a most learned and unfortunate Italian, born near Modena, 1446, was a striking instance," says his biographer, "of the miseries men bring upon themselves by setting their affections unreasonably on trifles. This learned man lived at Forli, and had an apartment in the palace. His room was so very dark, that he was forced to use a candle in the day-time; and one day, going abroad without putting it out, his library was set on fire, and some papers which he had prepared for the press were burned. The instant he was informed of this ill news, he was affected even to madness. He ran furiously to the palace, and stopping at the door of his apartment, he cried aloud, 'Christ Jesus! what mighty crime have I committed! whom of your followers have I ever injured, that you thus rage with inexpiable hatred against me?' Then turning himself to an image of the Virgin Mary near at hand, 'Virgin (says he) hear what I have to say, for I speak in earnest, and with a composed spirit: if I shall happen to address you in my dying moments, I humbly entreat you not to hear me, nor receive me into Heaven, for I am determined to spend all eternity in Hell!' Those who heard

these blasphemous expressions endeavoured to comfort him; but all to no purpose, for the society of mankind being no longer supportable to him, he left the city, and retired, like a savage, to the deep solitude of a wood. Some say that he was murdered there by ruffians: others, that he died at Bologna in 1500, after much contrition and penitence."

Perhaps the censure passed at the outset of the anecdote on this unfortunate person is unfounded and severe, when it is said that he brought his miseries on himself "by having set his affections unreasonably on trifles." To others it might appear so; but to himself the labour of a whole life was hardly a trifle. His passion was not a causeless one, though carried to such frantic excess. The story of Sir Isaac Newton presents a strong contrast to the last-mentioned one, who on going into his study and finding that his dog Tray had thrown down a candle on the table, and burnt some papers of great value, contented himself with exclaiming, "Ah! Tray, you don't know the mischief you have done!" Many persons would not forgive the overturning a cup of chocolate so soon.

I remember hearing an instance some years ago of a man of character and property who through unexpected losses had been condemned to a long and heart-breaking imprisonment, which he bore with exemplary fortitude. At

the end of four years, by the interest and exertions of friends, he obtained his discharge with every prospect of beginning the world afresh, and had made his arrangements for leaving his irksome abode, and meeting his wife and family, at a distance of two hundred miles, by a certain day. Owing to the miscarriage of a letter, some signature necessary to the completion of the business did not arrive in time, and on account of the informality which had thus arisen, he could not set out home till the return of the post, which was four days longer. His spirit could not brook the delay. He had wound himself up to the last pitch of expectation; he had, as it were, calculated his patience to hold out to a certain point, and then to throw down his load for ever, and he could not find resolution to resume it for a few hours beyond this He put an end to the intolerable conflict of hope and disappointment in a fit of excruciating anguish. Woes that we have time to foresee and leisure to contemplate break their force by being spread over a larger surface, and borne at intervals; but those that come upon us suddenly, for however short a time, seem to insult us by their unnecessary and uncalled-for intrusion; and the very prospect of relief, when held out and then withdrawn from us, to however small a distance, only frets impatience into agony by tantalising our hopes and wishes;

and to rend asunder the thin partition that separates us from our favourite object, we are ready to burst even the fetters of life itself.

I am not aware that any one has demonstrated how it is that a stronger capacity is required for the conduct of great affairs than of small ones. The organs of the mind, like the pupil of the eye, may be contracted or dilated to view a broader or a narrower surface, and yet find sufficient variety to occupy its attention in each. The material universe is infinitely divisible, and so is the texture of human affairs. We take things in the gross or in the detail, according to the occasion. I think I could as soon get up the budget of Ways and Means for the current year, as be sure of making both ends meet, and paying my rent at quarter-day in a paltry huckster's shop. Great objects move on by their own weight and impulse: great power turns aside petty obstacles; and he who wields it is often but the puppet of circumstances, like the fly on the wheel that said, "What a dust we raise!" It is easier to ruin a kingdom, and aggrandise one's own pride and prejudices, than to set up a green-grocer's stall. An idiot or a madman may do this at any time, whose word is law, and whose nod is fate. Nay, he whose look is obedience, and who understands the silent wishes of the great, may easily trample on the necks, and tread out the liberties

of a mighty nation, deriding their strength, and hating it the more from a consciousness of his own meanness. Power is not wisdom, it is true; but it equally ensures its own objects. It does not exact, but dispenses with talent. When a man creates this power, or new-moulds the state by sage counsels and bold enterprises, it is a different thing from overturning it with the levers that are put into his baby hands. In general, however, it may be argued that great transactions and complicated concerns ask more genius to conduct them than smaller ones, for this reason, viz., that the mind must be able either to embrace a greater variety of details in a more extensive range of objects, or must have a greater faculty of generalising, or a greater depth of insight into ruling principles, and so come at true results in that way. Buonaparte knew everything, even to the names of our cadets in the East-India service; but he failed in this, that he did not calculate the resistance which barbarism makes to refinement. He thought that the Russians could not burn Moscow, because the Parisians could not burn Paris. The French think everything must be French. The Cossacks, alas! do not conform to etiquette: the rudeness of the seasons knows no rules of politeness!—Some artists think it a test of genius to paint a large picture, and I grant the truth of this position, if the large

picture contains more than a small one. It is not the size of the canvas, but the quantity of truth and nature put into it, that settles the point. It is a mistake, common enough on this subject, to suppose that a miniature is more finished than an oil-picture. The miniature is inferior to the oil-picture only because it is less finished, because it cannot follow nature into so many individual and exact particulars. The proof of which is, that the copy of a good portrait will always make a highly-finished miniature (see for example Mr Bone's enamels), whereas the copy of a good miniature, if enlarged to the size of life, will make but a very sorry portrait. Several of our best artists, who are fond of painting large figures, invert this reasoning. They make the whole figure gigantic, not that they may have room for nature, but for the motion of their brush (as if they were painting the side of a house), regarding the extent of canvas they have to cover as an excuse for their slovenly and hasty manner of getting over it; and thus, in fact, leave their pictures nothing at last but over-grown miniatures, but huge caricatures. It is not necessary in any case (either in a larger or a smaller compass) to go into the details, so as to lose sight of the effect, and decompound the face into porous and transparent molecules, in the manner of Denner, who painted what he saw through a

magnifying glass. The painter's eye need not be a microscope, but I contend that it should be a looking-glass, bright, clear, lucid. The little in art begins with insignificant parts, with what does not tell in connection with other parts. The true artist will paint not material points, but moral quantities. In a word, wherever there is feeling or expression in a muscle or a vein, there is grandeur and refinement too.—I will conclude these remarks with an account of the manner in which the ancient sculptors combined great and little things in such matters. "That the name of Phidias," says Pliny, "is illustrious among all the nations that have heard of the fame of the Olympian Jupiter, no one doubts; but in order that those may know that he is deservedly praised who have not even seen his works, we shall offer a few arguments, and those of his genius only: nor to this purpose shall we insist on the beauty of the Olympian Jupiter, nor on the magnitude of the Minerva at Athens, though it is twenty-six cubits in height (about thirty-five feet), and is made of ivory and gold: but we shall refer to the shield, on which the battle of the Amazons is carved on the outer side: on the inside of the same is the fight of the Gods and Giants; and on the sandals, that between the Centaurs and Lapithæ; so well did every part of that work display the powers of the art. Again, the sculptures on the

pedestal he called the birth of Pandora: there are to be seen in number thirty Gods, the figure of Victory being particularly admirable: the learned also admire the figures of the serpent and the brazen sphinx, writhing under the spear. These things are mentioned, in passing, of an artist never enough to be commended, that it may be seen that he showed the same magnificence even in small things."—'Pliny's Natural History,' Book 36.

ESSAY V.

ON FAMILIAR STYLE.

It is not easy to write a familiar style. Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary, there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may so say, purity of expression, than the style I am speaking of. It utterly rejects not only all unmeaning pomp, but all low, cant phrases, and loose, unconnected, slipshod allusions. It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common use; it is not to throw words together in any combinations we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as any one would speak in common conversation, who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes. Or to give another illus-

tration, to write naturally is the same thing in regard to common conversation, as to read naturally is in regard to common speech. It does not follow that it is an easy thing to give the true accent and inflection to the words you utter, because you do not attempt to rise above the level of ordinary life and colloquial speaking. You do not assume indeed the solemnity of the pulpit, or the tone of stage-declamation: neither are you at liberty to gabble on at a venture, without emphasis or discretion, or to resort to vulgar dialect or clownish pronunciation. You must steer a middle course. You are tied down to a given and appropriate articulation, which is determined by the habitual associations between sense and sound, and which you can only hit by entering into the author's meaning, as you must find the proper words and style to express yourself by fixing your thoughts on the subject you have to write about. Any one may mouth out a passage with a theatrical cadence, or get upon stilts to tell his thoughts: but to write or speak with propriety and simplicity is a more difficult task. Thus it is easy to affect a pompous style, to use a word twice as big as the thing you want to express: it is not so easy to pitch upon the very word that exactly fits it. Out of eight or ten words equally common, equally intelligible, with nearly equal pretensions, it is a matter of some nicety and

discrimination to pick out the very one, the preferableness of which is scarcely perceptible, but decisive. The reason why I object to Dr Johnson's style is, that there is no discrimination, no selection, no variety in it. He uses none but "tall, opaque words," taken from the "first row of the rubric:"—words with the greatest number of syllables, or Latin phrases with merely English terminations. If a fine style depended on this sort of arbitrary pretension, it would be fair to judge of an author's elegance by the measurement of his words, and the substitution of foreign circumlocutions (with no precise associations) for the mother-tongue.* How simple is it to be dignified without ease, to be pompous without meaning! Surely it is but a mechanical rule for avoiding what is low to be always pedantic and affected. It is clear you cannot use a vulgar English word, if you never use a common English word at all. A fine tact is shown in adhering to those which are perfectly common, and yet never falling into any expressions which are debased by disgusting circumstances, or which owe their signification and point to technical or pro-

* I have heard of such a thing as an author, who makes it a rule never to admit a monosyllable into his vapid verse. Yet the charm and sweetness of Marlow's lines depended often on their being made up almost entirely of monosyllables.

fessional allusions. A truly natural or familiar style can never be quaint or vulgar, for this reason, that it is of universal force and applicability, and that quaintness and vulgarity arises out of the immediate connexion of certain words with coarse and disagreeable, or with confined ideas. The last form what we understand by cant or slang phrases.—To give an example of what is not very clear in the general statement. I should say that the phrase 'To cut with a knife,' or 'To cut a piece of wood,' is perfectly free from vulgarity, because it is perfectly common: but to cut an acquaintance is not quite unexceptionable, because it is not perfectly common or intelligible, and has hardly yet escaped out of the limits of slang phraseology. I should hardly therefore use the word in this sense without putting it in italics as a licence of expression, to be received *cum grano salis*. All provincial or bye-phrases come under the same mark of reprobation—all such as the writer transfers to the page from his fire-side or a particular *coterie*, or that he invents for his own sole use and convenience. I conceive that words are like money, not the worse for being common, but that it is the stamp of custom alone that gives them circulation or value. I am fastidious in this respect, and would almost as soon coin the currency of the realm as counterfeit the King's English. I never in-

vented or gave a new and unauthorised meaning to any word but one single one (the term impersonal applied to feelings), and that was in an abstruse metaphysical discussion to express a very difficult distinction. I have been (I know) loudly accused of revelling in vulgarisms and broken English. I cannot speak to that point: but so far I plead guilty to the determined use of acknowledged idioms and common elliptical expressions. I am not sure that the critics in question know the one from the other, that is, can distinguish any medium between formal pedantry and the most barbarous solecism. As an author, I endeavour to employ plain words and popular modes of construction, as, were I a chapman and dealer, I should common weights and measures.

The proper force of words lies not in the words themselves, but in their application. A word may be a fine-sounding word, of an unusual length, and very imposing from its learning and novelty, and yet in the connexion in which it is introduced, may be quite pointless and irrelevant. It is not pomp or pretension, but the adaptation of the expression to the idea that clenches a writer's meaning:—as it is not the size or glossiness of the materials, but their being fitted each to its place, that gives strength to the arch; or as the pegs and nails are as necessary to the support of the building as the

larger timbers, and more so than the mere showy, unsubstantial ornaments. I hate anything that occupies more space than it is worth. I hate to see a load of band-boxes go along the street, and I hate to see a parcel of big words without anything in them. A person who does not deliberately dispose of all his thoughts alike in cumbrous draperies and flimsy disguises, may strike out twenty varieties of familiar every-day language, each coming somewhat nearer to the feeling he wants to convey, and at last not hit upon that particular and only one, which may be said to be identical with the exact impression in his mind. This would seem to show that Mr Cobbett is hardly right in saying that the first word that occurs is always the best. It may be a very good one; and yet a better may present itself on reflection or from time to time. It should be suggested naturally, however, and spontaneously, from a fresh and lively conception of the subject. We seldom succeed by trying at improvement, or by merely substituting one word for another that we are not satisfied with, as we cannot recollect the name of a place or person by merely plaguing ourselves about it. We wander farther from the point by persisting in a wrong scent; but it starts up accidentally in the memory when we least expected it, by touching some link in the chain of previous association.

There are those who hoard up and make a cautious display of nothing but rich and rare phraseology;—ancient medals, obscure coins, and Spanish pieces of eight. They are very curious to inspect; but I myself would neither offer nor take them in the course of exchange. A sprinkling of archaisms is not amiss; but a tissue of obsolete expressions is more fit for keep than wear. I do not say I would not use any phrase that had been brought into fashion before the middle or the end of the last century; but I should be shy of using any that had not been employed by any approved author during the whole of that time. Words, like clothes, get old-fashioned, or mean and ridiculous, when they have been for some time laid aside. Mr Lamb is the only imitator of old English style I can read with pleasure: and he is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors, that the idea of imitation is almost done away. There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject, that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress. The matter is completely his own, though the manner is assumed. Perhaps his ideas are altogether so marked and individual, as to require their point and pungency to be neutralised by the affectation of a singular but traditional form of conveyance.

Tricked out in the prevailing costume, they would probably seem more startling and out of the way. The old English authors, Burton, Fuller, Coryate, Sir Thomas Brown, are a kind of mediators between us and the more eccentric and whimsical modern, reconciling us to his peculiarities. I do not however know how far this is the case or not, till he condescends to write like one of us. I must confess that what I like best of his papers under the signature of Elia (still I do not presume, amidst such excellence, to decide what is most excellent) is the account of Mrs Battle's 'Opinions on Whist,' which is also the most free from obsolete allusions and turns of expression—

"A well of native English undefiled."

To those acquainted with his admired prototypes, these Essays of the ingenious and highly gifted author have the same sort of charm and relish, that Erasmus's Colloquies or a fine piece of modern Latin have to the classical scholar. Certainly, I do not know any borrowed pencil that has more power or felicity of execution than the one of which I have here been speaking.

It is as easy to write a gaudy style without ideas, as it is to spread a pallet of showy colours, or to smear in a flaunting transparency. "What do you read?"—"Words, words, words."—

"What is the matter?"—"Nothing," it might be answered. The florid style is the reverse of the familiar. The last is employed as an unvarnished medium to convey ideas; the first is resorted to as a spangled veil to conceal the want of them. When there is nothing to be set down but words, it costs little to have them fine. Look through the dictionary, and cull out a *florilegium*, rival the *tulippomania*. *Rouge* high enough, and never mind the natural complexion. The vulgar, who are not in the secret, will admire the look of preternatural health and vigour; and the fashionable, who regard only appearances, will be delighted with the imposition. Keep to your sounding generalities, your tinkling phrases, and all will be well. Swell out an unmeaning truism to a perfect tympany of style. A thought, a distinction is the rock on which all this brittle cargo of verbiage splits at once. Such writers have merely verbal imaginations, that retain nothing but words. Or their puny thoughts have dragon-wings, all green and gold. They soar far above the vulgar failing of the *Sermo humi obrepens*—their most ordinary speech is never short of an hyperbole, splendid, imposing, vague, incomprehensible, magniloquent, a cento of sounding common-places. If some of us, whose "ambition is more lowly," pry a little too narrowly into nooks and corners to pick up a number of

"unconsidered trifles," they never once direct their eyes or lift their hands to seize on any but the most gorgeous, tarnished, thread-bare, patch-work set of phrases, the left-off finery of poetic extravagance, transmitted down through successive generations of barren pretenders. If they criticise actors and actresses, a huddled phantasmagoria of feathers, spangles, floods of light, and oceans of sound float before their morbid sense, which they paint in the style of Ancient Pistol. Not a glimpse can you get of the merits or defects of the performers: they are hidden in a profusion of barbarous epithets and wilful rhodomontade. Our hypercritics are not thinking of these little fantoccini beings—

"That strut and fret their hour upon the stage"—

but of tall phantoms of words, abstractions, *genera* and *species*, sweeping clauses, periods that unite the Poles, forced alliterations, astounding antitheses—

"And on their pens *Fustian* sits plumed."

If they describe kings and queens, it is an Eastern pageant. The Coronation at either House is nothing to it. We get at four repeated images—a curtain, a throne, a sceptre, and a foot-stool. These are with them the wardrobe of a lofty imagination; and they turn

their servile strains to servile uses. Do we read a description of pictures? It is not a reflection of tones and hues which "nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on," but piles of precious stones, rubies, pearls, emeralds, Golconda's mines, and all the blazonry of art. Such persons are in fact besotted with words, and their brains are turned with the glittering, but empty and sterile phantoms of things. Personifications, capital letters, seas of sunbeams, visions of glory, shining inscriptions, the figures of a transparency, Britannia with her shield, or Hope leaning on an anchor, make up their stock in trade. They may be considered as hiero glyphical writers. Images stand out in their minds isolated and important merely in themselves, without any ground-work of feeling —there is no context in their imaginations. Words affect them in the same way, by the mere sound, that is, by their possible, not by their actual application to the subject in hand. They are fascinated by first appearances, and have no sense of consequences. Nothing more is meant by them than meets the ear: they understand or feel nothing more than meets their eye. The web and texture of the universe, and of the heart of man, is a mystery to them: they have no faculty that strikes a chord in unison with it. They cannot get beyond the daubings of fancy, the varnish of

sentiment. Objects are not linked to feelings, words to things, but images revolve in splendid mockery, words represent themselves in their strange rhapsodies. The categories of such a mind are pride and ignorance—pride in outside show, to which they sacrifice everything, and ignorance of the true worth and hidden structure both of words and things. With a sovereign contempt for what is familiar and natural, they are the slaves of vulgar affectation—of a routine of high-flown phrases. Scorning to imitate realities, they are unable to invent anything, to strike out one original idea. They are not copyists of nature, it is true: but they are the poorest of all plagiarists, the plagiarists of words. All is far-fetched, dear-bought, artificial, oriental, in subject and allusion: all is mechanical, conventional, vapid, formal, pedantic in style and execution. They startle and confound the understanding of the reader, by the remoteness and obscurity of their illustrations: they soothe the ear by the monotony of the same everlasting round of circuitous metaphors. They are the mock-school in poetry and prose. They flounder about between fustian in expression, and bathos in sentiment. They tantalise the fancy, but never reach the head nor touch the heart. Their Temple of Fame is like a shadowy structure

raised by Dulness to Vanity, or like Cowper's description of the Empress of Russia's palace of ice, "as worthless as in show 'twas glittering"—

"It smiled, and it was cold!"

ESSAY VI.

ON EFFEMINACY OF CHARACTER.

EFFEMINACY of character arises from a prevalence of the sensibility over the will: or it consists in a want of fortitude to bear pain or to undergo fatigue, however urgent the occasion. We meet with instances of people who cannot lift up a little finger to save themselves from ruin, nor give up the smallest indulgence for the sake of any other person. They cannot put themselves out of their way on any account. No one makes a greater outcry when the day of reckoning comes, or affects greater compassion for the mischiefs they have occasioned; but till the time comes, they feel nothing, they care for nothing. They live in the present moment, are the creatures of the present impulse (whatever it may be)—and beyond that, the universe is nothing to them. The slightest toy countervails the empire of the world; they will not forego the smallest inclination they feel,

for any object that can be proposed to them, or any reasons that can be urged for it. You might as well ask of the gossamer not to wanton in the idle summer air, or of the moth not to play with the flame that scorches it, as ask of these persons to put off any enjoyment for a single instant, or to gird themselves up to any enterprise of pith or moment. They have been so used to a studied succession of agreeable sensations, that the shortest pause is a privation which they can by no means endure—it is like tearing them from their very existence—they have been so inured to ease and indolence, that the most trifling effort is like one of the tasks of Hercules, a thing of impossibility, at which they shudder. They lie on beds of roses, and spread their gauze wings to the sun and summer gale, and cannot bear to put their tender feet to the ground, much less to encounter the thorns and briers of the world. Life for them

——"rolls o'er Elysian flowers its amber stream"—

and they have no fancy for fishing in troubled waters. The ordinary state of existence they regard as something importunate and vain, and out of nature. What must they think of its trials and sharp vicissitudes? Instead of voluntarily embracing pain, or labour, or danger, or death, every sensation must be wound up to

the highest pitch of voluptuous refinement, every motion must be grace and elegance; they live in a luxurious, endless dream, or

"Die of a rose in aromatic pain!"

Siren sounds must float around them; smiling forms must everywhere meet their sight; they must tread a soft measure on painted carpets or smooth-shaven lawns; books, arts, jests, laughter, occupy every thought and hour—what have they to do with the drudgery, the struggles, the poverty, the disease or anguish, which are the common lot of humanity! These things are intolerable to them, even in imagination. They disturb the enchantment in which they are lapt. They cause a wrinkle in the clear and polished surface of their existence. They exclaim with impatience and in agony, "Oh, leave me to my repose!" How "they shall discourse the freezing hours away, when wind and rain beat dark December down," or "bide the pelting of the pitiless storm," gives them no concern, it never once enters their heads. They close the shutters, draw the curtains, and enjoy or shut out the whistling of the approaching tempest. "They take no thought for the morrow," not they. They do not anticipate evils. Let them come when they will come, they will not run to meet them. Nay more, they will not move one step to prevent

them, not let any one else. The mention of such things is shocking; the very supposition is a nuisance that must not be tolerated. The idea of the trouble, the precautions, the negotiations necessary to obviate disagreeable consequences oppresses them to death, is an exertion too great for their enervated imaginations. They are not like Master Barnardine in 'Measure for Measure,' who would not "get up to be hanged"—they would not get up to avoid being hanged. They are completely wrapped up in themselves; but then all their self-love is concentrated in the present minute. They have worked up their effeminate and fastidious appetite of enjoyment to such a pitch, that the whole of their existence, every moment of it, must be made up of these exquisite indulgences; or they will fling it all away, with indifference and scorn. They stake their entire welfare on the gratification of the passing instant. Their senses, their vanity, their thoughtless gaiety have been pampered till they ache at the smallest suspension of their perpetual dose of excitement, and they will purchase the hollow happiness of the next five minutes, by a mortgage on the independence and comfort of years They must have their will in everything, or they grow sullen and peevish, like spoiled children. Whatever they set their eyes on, or make up their minds to, they must have

that instant. They may pay for it hereafter. But that is no matter. They snatch a joy beyond the reach of fate, and consider the present time sacred, inviolable, unaccountable to that hard, churlish, niggard, inexorable task-master, the future. "Now or never" is their motto. They are madly devoted to the play-thing, the ruling passion of the moment. What is to happen to them a week hence is as if it were to happen to them a thousand years hence. They put off the consideration for another day, and their heedless unconcern laughs at it as a fable. Their life is "a cell of ignorance, travelling a-bed;" their existence is ephemeral; their thoughts are insect-winged, their identity expires with the whim, the folly, the passion of the hour.

Nothing but a miracle can rouse such people from their lethargy. It is not to be expected, nor is it even possible in the natural course of things. Pope's striking exclamation,

> "Oh! blindness to the future kindly given,
> That each may fill the circuit mark'd by Heaven!"

hardly applies here; namely, to evils that stare us in the face, and that might be averted with the least prudence or resolution. But nothing can be done. How should it? A slight evil, a distant danger will not move them; and a more imminent one only makes them turn away from it in greater precipitation and alarm.

The more desperate their affairs grow, the more averse they are to look into them; and the greater the effort required to retrieve them, the more incapable they are of it. At first, they will not do anything; and afterwards, it is too late. The very motives that imperiously urge them to self-reflection and amendment, combine with their natural disposition to prevent it. This amounts pretty nearly to a mathematical demonstration. Ease, vanity, pleasure, are the ruling passions in such cases. How will you conquer these, or wean their infatuated votaries from them? By the dread of hardship, disgrace, pain? They turn from them and you who point them out as the alternative, with sickly disgust; and instead of a stronger effort of courage or self-denial to avert the crisis, hasten it by a wilful determination to pamper the disease in every way, and arm themselves, not with fortitude to bear or to repel the consequences, but with judicial blindness to their approach. Will you rouse the indolent procrastinator to an irksome but necessary effort, by showing him how much he has to do? He will only draw back the more for all your intreaties and representations. If of a sanguine turn, he will make a slight attempt at a new plan of life, be satisfied with the first appearance of reform, and relapse into indolence again. If timid and undecided, the hopelessness of the undertaking will put him

out of heart with it, and he will stand still in despair. Will you save a vain man from ruin, by pointing out the obloquy and ridicule that await him in his present career? He smiles at your forebodings as fantastical; or the more they are realised around him, the more he is impelled to keep out the galling conviction, and the more fondly he clings to flattery and death. He will not make a bold and resolute attempt to recover his reputation, because that would imply that it was capable of being soiled or injured; or he no sooner meditates some desultory project, than he takes credit to himself for the execution, and is delighted to wear his unearned laurels while the thing is barely talked of. The chance of success relieves the uneasiness of his apprehensions; so that he makes use of the interval only to flatter his favourite infirmity again. Would you wean a man from sensual excesses by the inevitable consequences to which they lead?—What holds more antipathy to pleasure than pain? The mind given up to self-indulgence, revolts at suffering; and throws it from it as an unaccountable anomaly, as a piece of injustice when it comes. Much less will it acknowledge any affinity with or subjection to it as a mere threat. If the prediction does not immediately come true, we laugh at the prophet of ill: if it is verified, we hate our adviser proportionably,

hug our vices the closer, and hold them dearer and more precious, the more they cost us. We resent wholesome counsel as an impertinence, and consider those who warn us of impending mischief, as if they had brought it on our heads. We cry out with the poetical enthusiast—

> "And let us nurse the fond deceit ;
> And what if we must die in sorrow ?
> Who would not cherish dreams so sweet,
> Though grief and pain should come to-morrow ?"

But oh thou ! who didst lend me speech when I was dumb, to whom I owe it that I have not crept on my belly all the days of my life like the serpent, but sometimes lift my forked crest or tread the empyrean, wake thou out of thy mid-day slumbers ! Shake off the heavy honey-dew of thy soul, no longer lulled with that Circean cup, drinking thy own thoughts with thy own ears, but start up in thy promised likeness, and shake the pillared rottenness of the world ! Leave not thy sounding words in air, write them in marble, and teach the coming age heroic truths ! Up, and wake the echoes of Time ! Rich in deepest lore, die not the bed-rid churl of knowledge, leaving the survivors unblest ! Set, set as thou didst rise in pomp and gladness ! Dart like the sun-flower one broad, golden flash of light; and ere thou ascendest thy native sky, show us the steps by which

thou didst scale the Heaven of philosophy, with Truth and Fancy for thy equal guides, that we may catch thy mantle, rainbow-dipped, and still read thy words dear to Memory, dearer to Fame!

There is another branch of this character, which is the trifling or dilatory character. Such persons are always creating difficulties, and unable or unwilling to remove them. They cannot brush aside a cobweb, and are stopped by an insect's wing. Their character is imbecility, rather than effeminacy. The want of energy and resolution in the persons last described, arises from the habitual and inveterate predominance of other feelings and motives; in these it is a mere want of energy and resolution, that is, an inherent natural defect of vigour of nerve and voluntary power. There is a specific levity about such persons, so that you cannot propel them to any object, or give them a decided momentum in any direction or pursuit. They turn back, as it were, on the occasion that should project them forward with manly force and vehemence. They shrink from intrepidity of purpose, and are alarmed at the idea of attaining their end too soon. They will not act with steadiness or spirit, either for themselves or you. If you chalk out a line of conduct for them, or commission them to execute a certain task, they are sure to conjure up some insig-

nificant objection or fanciful impediment in the way, and are withheld from striking an effectual blow by mere feebleness of character. They may be officious, good-natured, friendly, generous in disposition, but they are of no use to any one. They will put themselves to twice the trouble you desire, not to carry your point, but to defeat it; and in obviating needless objections, neglect the main business. If they do what you want, it is neither at the time nor in the manner that you wish. This timidity amounts to treachery; for by always anticipating some misfortune or disgrace, they realise their unmeaning apprehensions. The little bears sway in their minds over the great: a small inconvenience outweighs a solid and indispensable advantage; and their strongest bias is uniformly derived from the weakest motive. They hesitate about the best way of beginning a thing till the opportunity for action is lost, and are less anxious about its being done than the precise manner of doing it. They will destroy a passage sooner than let an objectionable word pass; and are much less concerned about the truth or the beauty of an image, than about the reception it will meet with from the critics. They alter what they write, not because it is, but because it may possibly be wrong; and in their tremulous solicitude to avoid imaginary blunders, run into real ones. What is curious

enough is, that with all this caution and delicacy, they are continually liable to extraordinary oversights. They are in fact so full of all sorts of idle apprehensions, that they do not know how to distinguish real from imaginary grounds of apprehension; and they often give some unaccountable offence either from assuming a sudden boldness half in sport, or while they are secretly pluming themselves on their dexterity in avoiding everything exceptionable: and the same distraction of motive and short-sightedness which gets them into scrapes, hinders them from seeing their way out of them. Such persons (often of ingenious and susceptible minds) are constantly at cross-purposes with themselves and others; will neither do things nor let others do them; and whether they succeed or fail, never feel confident or at their ease. They spoil the freshness and originality of their own thoughts by asking contradictory advice; and in befriending others, while they are about it and about it, you might have done the thing yourself a dozen times over.

There is nothing more to be esteemed than a manly firmness and decision of character. I like a person who knows his own mind and sticks to it; who sees at once what is to be done in given circumstances and does it. He does not beat about the bush for difficulties or

excuses, but goes the shortest and most effectual way to work to attain his own ends, or to accomplish a useful object. If he can serve you, he will do so; if he cannot, he will say so without keeping you in needless suspense, or laying you under pretended obligations. The applying to him in any laudable undertaking is not like stirring "a dish of skimmed milk." There is stuff in him, and it is of the right practicable sort. He is not all his life at hawk and buzzard whether he shall be a Whig or a Tory, a friend or a foe, a knave or a fool; but thinks that life is short, and that there is no time to play fantastic tricks in it, to tamper with principles, or trifle with individual feelings. If he gives you a character, he does not add a damning clause to it: he does not pick holes in you lest others should, or anticipate objections lest he should be thought to be blinded by a childish partiality. His object is to serve you; and not to play the game into your enemies' hands.

> "A generous friendship no cold medium knows,
> Burns with one love, with one resentment glows."

I should be sorry for any one to say what he did not think of me; but I should not be pleased to see him slink out of his acknowledged opinion, lest it should not be confirmed by malice or stupidity. He who is well acquainted and well

inclined to you, ought to give the tone, not to receive it from others, and may set it to what key he pleases in certain cases.

There are those of whom it has been said, that to them an obligation is a reason for not doing anything, and there are others who are invariably led to do the reverse of what they should. The last are perverse, the first impracticable people. Opposed to the effeminate in disposition and manners are the coarse and brutal. As those were all softness and smoothness, these affect or are naturally attracted to whatever is vulgar and violent, harsh and repulsive in tone, in modes of speech, in forms of address, in gesture and behaviour. Thus there are some who ape the lisping of the fine lady, the drawling of the fine gentleman, and others who all their lives delight in and catch the uncouth dialect, the manners and expressions of clowns and hoydens. The last are governed by an instinct of the disagreeable, by an appetite and headlong rage for violating decorum, and hurting other people's feelings, their own being excited and enlivened by the shock. They deal in home truths, unpleasant reflections, and unwelcome matters of fact; as the others are all compliment and complaisance, insincerity and insipidity.

We may observe an effeminacy of style, in some degree corresponding to effeminacy of

character. Writers of this stamp are great interliners of what they indite, alterers of indifferent phrases, and the plague of printers' devils. By an effeminate style I would be understood to mean one that is all florid, all fine; that cloys by its sweetness, and tires by its sameness. Such are what Dryden calls "calm, peaceable writers." They only aim to please, and never offend by truth or disturb by singularity. Every thought must be beautiful *per se*, every expression equally fine. They do not delight in vulgarisms, but in common places, and dress out unmeaning forms in all the colours of the rainbow. They do not go out of their way to think—that would startle the indolence of the reader: they cannot express a trite thought in common words—that would be a sacrifice of their own vanity. They are not sparing of tinsel, for it costs nothing. Their works should be printed, as they generally are, on hot-pressed paper, with vignette margins. The Della Cruscan school comes under this description, but is now nearly exploded. Lord Byron is a pampered and aristocratic writer, but he is not effeminate, or we should not have his works with only the printer's name to them! I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr Keats's poems was a deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of

strength and substance. His Endymion is a very delightful description of the illusions of a youthful imagination, given up to airy dreams—we have flowers, clouds, rainbows, moonlight, all sweet sounds and smells, and Oreads and Dryads flitting by—but there is nothing tangible in it, nothing marked or palpable—we have none of the hardy spirit or rigid forms of antiquity. He painted his own thoughts and character; and did not transport himself into the fabulous and heroic ages. There is a want of action, of character, and so far of imagination, but there is exquisite fancy. All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle. We see in him the youth, without the manhood of poetry. His genius breathed "vernal delight and joy."—"Like Maia's son he stood and shook his plumes," with fragrance filled. His mind was redolent of spring. He had not the fierceness of summer, nor the richness of autumn, and winter he seemed not to have known, till he felt the icy hand of death!

ESSAY VII.

WHY DISTANT OBJECTS PLEASE.

DISTANT objects please, because, in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. In looking at the misty mountain-tops that bound the horizon, the mind is as it were conscious of all the conceivable objects and interests that lie between; we imagine all sorts of adventures in the interim; strain our hopes and wishes to reach the air-drawn circle, or to "descry new lands, rivers, and mountains," stretching far beyond it: our feelings carried out of themselves lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty, turning to ethereal mould, sky-tinctured. We drink the air before us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing. Where the landscape fades from the dull sight, we fill

the thin, viewless space with shapes of unknown good, and tinge the hazy prospect with hopes and wishes and more charming fears.

> "But thou, oh Hope! with eyes so fair,
> What was thy delighted measure?
> Still it whisper'd promised pleasure,
> And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail!"

Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure; and all but the present moment, but the present spot, passion claims for its own, and brooding over it with wings outspread, stamps it with an image of itself. Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines, and are moulded by its touch. When I was a boy I lived within sight of a range of lofty hills, whose blue tops blending with the setting sun had often tempted my longing eyes and wandering feet. At last I put my project in execution, and on a nearer approach, instead of glimmering air woven into fantastic shapes, found them huge lumpish heaps of discoloured earth. I learnt from this (in part) to leave "Yarrow unvisited," and not idly to disturb a dream of good!

Distance of time has much the same effect as distance of place. It is not surprising that

fancy colours the prospect of the future as it thinks good, when it even effaces the forms of memory. Time takes out the sting of pain; our sorrows after a certain period have been so often steeped in a medium of thought and passion, that they "unmould their essence;" and all that remains of our original impressions is what we would wish them to have been. Not only the untried steep ascent before us, but the rude, unsightly masses of our past experience presently resume their power of deception over the eye: the golden cloud soon rests upon their heads, and the purple light of fancy clothes their barren sides! Thus we pass on, while both ends of our existence touch upon Heaven! —There is (so to speak) "a mighty stream of tendency" to good in the human mind, upon which all objects float and are imperceptibly borne along: and though in the voyage of life we meet with strong rebuffs, with rocks and quicksands, yet there is "a tide in the affairs of men," a heaving and a restless aspiration of the soul, by means of which, "with sails and tackle torn," the wreck and scattered fragments of our entire being drift into the port and haven of our desires! In all that relates to the affections, we put the will for the deed:—so that the instant the pressure of unwelcome circumstances is removed, the mind recoils from their hold, recovers its elasticity, and re-unites itself

to that image of good, which is but a reflection and configuration of its own nature. Seen in the distance, in the long perspective of waning years, the meanest incidents, enlarged and enriched by countless recollections, become interesting; the most painful, broken and softened by time, soothe. How any object, that unexpectedly brings back to us old scenes and associations, startles the mind! What a yearning it creates within us: what a longing to leap the intermediate space! How fondly we cling to, and try to revive the impression of all that we then were!

"Such tricks hath strong imagination!"

In truth, we impose upon ourselves, and know not what we wish. It is a cunning artifice, a quaint delusion, by which, in pretending to be what we were at a particular moment of time, we would fain be all that we have since been, and have our lives to come over again. It is not the little, glimmering, almost annihilated speck in the distance, that rivets our attention and "hangs upon the beatings of our hearts:" it is the interval that separates us from it, and of which it is the trembling boundary, that excites all this coil and mighty pudder in the breast. Into that great gap in our being "come thronging soft desires" and infinite regrets. It is the contrast, the change from what we then

were, that arms the half-extinguished recollection with its giant strength, and lifts the fabric of the affections from its shadowy base. In contemplating its utmost verge, we overlook the map of our existence, and re-tread, in apprehension, the journey of life. So it is that in early youth we strain our eager sight after the pursuits of manhood; and, as we are sliding off the stage, strive to gather up the toys and flowers that pleased our thoughtless childhood.

When I was quite a boy, my father used to take me to the Montpelier Tea-gardens at Walworth. Do I go there now? No: the place is deserted, and its borders and its beds o'erturned. Is there, then, nothing that can

"Bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower?"

Oh! yes. I unlock the casket of memory, and draw back the warders of the brain; and there this scene of my infant wanderings still lives unfaded, or with fresher dyes. A new sense comes upon me, as in a dream; a richer perfume, brighter colours start out; my eyes dazzle; my heart heaves with its new load of bliss, and I am a child again. My sensations are all glossy, spruce, voluptuous, and fine: they wear a candied coat, and are in holiday trim. I see the beds of larkspur with purple eyes; tall hollyhocks, red and yellow; the brown sun-flowers,

caked in gold, with bees buzzing round them; wildernesses of pinks, and hot-glowing pionies; poppies run to seed; the sugared lily, and faint mignionette, all ranged in order, and as thick as they can grow; the box-tree borders; the gravel-walks, the painted alcove, the confectionary, the clotted cream:—I think I see them now with sparkling looks; or have they vanished while I have been writing this description of them? No matter; they will return again when I least think of them. All that I have observed since, of flowers and plants, and grass-plots, and of suburb delights, seems, to me, borrowed from "that first garden of my innocence"—to be slips and scions stolen from that bed of memory. In this manner the darlings of our childhood burnish out in the eye of after years, and derive their sweetest perfume from the first heartfelt sigh of pleasure breathed upon them,

> ———"like the sweet south,
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour!"

If I have pleasure in a flower garden, I have in a kitchen garden too, and for the same reason. If I see a row of cabbage-plants or of peas or beans coming up, I immediately think of those which I used so carefully to water of an evening at W—e—m, when my day's tasks were done, and of the pain with which I saw them droop

and hang down their leaves in the morning's sun. Again, I never see a child's kite in the air, but it seems to pull at my heart. It is to me "a thing of life." I feel the twinge at my elbow, the flutter and palpitation, with which I used to let go the string of my own, as it rose in the air and towered among the clouds. My little cargo of hopes and fears ascended with it; and as it made a part of my own consciousness then, it does so still, and appears "like some gay creature of the element," my playmate when life was young, and twin-born with my earliest recollections. I could enlarge on this subject of childish amusements, but Mr Leigh Hunt has treated it so well, in a paper in the *Indicator*, on the productions of the toy-shops of the metropolis, that if I were to insist more on it, I should only pass for an imitator of that ingenious and agreeable writer, *and for an indifferent one into the bargain.*

Sounds, smells, and sometimes tastes, are remembered longer than visible objects, and serve, perhaps, better for links in the chain of association. The reason seems to be this: they are in their nature intermittent, and comparatively rare; whereas objects of sight are always before us, and, by their continuous succession, drive one another out. The eye is always open; and between any given impression and its recurrence a second time, fifty thousand other im-

pressions have, in all likelihood, been stamped upon the sense and on the brain. The other senses are not so active or vigilant. They are but seldom called into play. The ear, for example, is oftener courted by silence than noise; and the sounds that break that silence sink deeper and more durably into the mind. I have a more present and lively recollection of certain scents, tastes, and sounds, for this reason, than I have of mere visible images, because they are more original, and less worn by frequent repetition. Where there is nothing interposed between any two impressions, whatever the distance of time that parts them, they naturally seem to touch; and the renewed impression recals the former one in full force, without distraction or competitor. The taste of barberries, which have hung out in the snow during the severity of a North American winter, I have in my mouth still, after an interval of thirty years; for I have met with no other taste, in all that time, at all like it. It remains by itself, almost like the impression of a sixth sense. But the colour is mixed up indiscriminately with the colours of many other berries, nor should I be able to distinguish it among them. The smell of a brick-kiln carries the evidence of its own identity with it: neither is it to me (from peculiar associations) unpleasant. The colour of brick-dust, on the contrary, is more common, and

easily confounded with other colours. Raphael did not keep it quite distinct from his flesh-colour. I will not say that we have a more perfect recollection of the human voice than of that complex picture the human face, but I think the sudden hearing of a well-known voice has something in it more affecting and striking than the sudden meeting with the face: perhaps, indeed, this may be because we have a more familiar remembrance of the one than the other, and the voice takes us more by surprise on that account. I am by no means certain (generally speaking) that we have the ideas of the other senses so accurate and well made out as those of visible form: what I chiefly mean is, that the feelings belonging to the sensations of our other organs, when accidentally recalled, are kept more separate and pure. Musical sounds, probably, owe a good deal of their interest and romantic effect to the principle here spoken of. Were they constant, they would become indifferent, as we may find with respect to disagreeable noises, which we do not hear after a time. I know no situation more pitiable than that of a blind fiddler, who has but one sense left (if we except the sense of snuff-taking*) and who has that stunned or deafened by his own villanous noises. Shakespear says,

* See Wilkie's Blind Fiddler.

"How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night!"

It has been observed, in explanation of this passage, that it is because in the day-time lovers are occupied with one another's faces, but that at night they can only distinguish the sound of each other's voices. I know not how this may be: but I have, ere now, heard a voice break so upon the silence,

"To angels' 'twas most like,"

and charm the moonlight air with its balmy essence, that the budding leaves trembled to its accents. Would I might have heard it once more whisper peace and hope (as erst when it was mingled with the breath of spring), and with its soft pulsations lift winged fancy to heaven! But it has ceased, or turned where I no more shall hear it!—Hence, also, we see what is the charm of the shepherd's pastoral reed; and why we hear him, as it were, piping to his flock, even in a picture. Our ears are fancy-stung! I remember once strolling along the margin of a stream, skirted with willows and plashy sedges, in one of those low sheltered valleys on Salisbury Plain, where the monks of former ages had planted chapels and built hermits' cells. There was a little parish church near, but tall elms and quivering alders hid it from my sight, when, all of a sudden, I

was startled by the sound of the full organ pealing on the ear, accompanied by rustic voices and the willing quire of village-maids and children. It rose, indeed, "like an exhalation of rich distilled perfumes." The dew from a thousand pastures was gathered in its softness; the silence of a thousand years spoke in it. It came upon the heart like the calm beauty of death: fancy caught the sound, and faith mounted on it to the skies. It filled the valley like a mist, and still poured out its endless chant, and still it swells upon the ear, and wraps me in a golden trance, drowning the noisy tumult of the world

There is a curious and interesting discussion, on the comparative distinctness of our visual and other external impressions, in Mr Fearn's 'Essay on Consciousness,' with which I shall try to descend from this rhapsody to the ground of common sense and plain reasoning again. After observing, a little before, that "nothing is more untrue than that sensations of vision do necessarily leave more vivid and durable ideas than those of grosser senses," he proceeds to give a number of illustrations in support of this position. "Notwithstanding," he says, "the advantages here enumerated in favour of sight, I think there is no doubt that a man will come to forget acquaintance, and many other visible objects, noticed in mature age, before he will

in the least forget tastes and smells, of only moderate interest, encountered either in his childhood, or at any time since.

"In the course of voyaging to various distant regions, it has several times happened that I have eaten once or twice of different things that never came in my way before nor since. Some of these have been pleasant, and some scarce better than insipid; but I have no reason to think I have forgot, or much altered, the ideas left by those single impulses of taste; though here the memory of them certainly has not been preserved by repetition. It is clear I must have seen, as well as tasted, those things; and I am decided that I remember the tastes with more precision than I do the visual sensations.

"I remember having once, and only once, eat Kangaroo in New Holland; and having once smelled a baker's shop, having a peculiar odour, in the city of Bassorah. Now both these gross ideas remain with me quite as vivid as any visual ideas of those places; and this could not be from repetition, but really from interest in the sensation.

"Twenty-eight years ago, in the island of Jamaica, I partook (perhaps twice) of a certain fruit, of the taste of which I have now a very fresh idea; and I could add other instances of that period.

"I have had repeated proofs of having lost retention of visual objects, at various distances of time, though they had once been familiar. I have not, during thirty years, forgot the delicate, and in itself most trifling sensation, that the palm of my hand used to convey, when I was a boy, trying the different effects of what boys call light and heavy tops; but I cannot remember within several shades of the brown coat which I left off a week ago. If any man thinks he can do better, let him take an ideal survey of his wardrobe, and then actually refer to it for proof.

"After retention of such ideas, it certainly would be very difficult to persuade me that feeling, taste, and smell can scarce be said to leave ideas, unless indistinct and obscure ones. . .

"Show a Londoner correct models of twenty London churches, and, at the same time, a model of each, which differs, in several considerable features, from the truth, and I venture to say he shall not tell you, in any instance, which is the correct one, except by mere chance.

"If he is an architect, he may be much more correct than any ordinary person: and this obviously is, because he has felt an interest in viewing these structures, which an ordinary person does not feel: and here interest is the sole reason of his remembering more correctly than his neighbour.

"I once heard a person quaintly ask another, How many trees were there in St Paul's churchyard? The question itself indicates that many cannot answer it; and this is found to be the case with those who have passed the church an hundred times: whilst the cause is, that every individual in the busy stream which glides past St Paul's is engrossed in various other interests.

"How often does it happen that we enter a well-known apartment, or meet a well-known friend, and receive some vague idea of visible difference, but cannot possibly find out what it is; until at length we come to perceive (or perhaps must be told) that some ornament or furniture is removed, altered, or added in the apartment; or that our friend has cut his hair, taken a wig, or has made any of twenty considerable alterations in his appearance. At other times, we have no perception of alteration whatever, though the like has taken place.

"It is, however, certain, that sight, appositied with interest, can retain tolerably exact copies of sensations, especially if not too complex; such as of the human countenance and figure. Yet the voice will convince us, when the countenance will not; and he is reckoned an excellent painter, and no ordinary genius, who can make a tolerable likeness from memory.

Nay, more, it is a conspicuous proof of the inaccuracy of visual ideas, that it is an effort of consummate art, attained by many years' practice, to take a strict likeness of the human countenance, even when the object is present; and among those cases, where the wilful cheat of flattery has been avoided, we still find in how very few instances the best painters produce a likeness up to the life, though practice and interest join in the attempt.

"I imagine an ordinary person would find it very difficult, supposing he had some knowledge of drawing, to afford, from memory, a tolerable sketch of such a familiar object as his curtain, his carpet, or his dressing-gown, if the pattern of either be at all various or irregular; yet he will instantly tell, with precision, either if his snuff or his wine has not the same character it had yesterday, though both these are compounds.

"Beyond all this I may observe, that a draper, who is in the daily habit of such comparisons, cannot carry in his mind the particular shade of a colour during a second of time; and has no certainty of tolerably matching two simple colours, except by placing the patterns in contact."—'Essay on Consciousness,' p. 303.

I will conclude the subject of this Essay with observing, that (as it appears to me) a nearer and more familiar acquaintance with persons

has a different and more favourable effect than that with places or things. The latter improve (as an almost universal rule) by being removed to a distance: the former, generally at least, gain by being brought nearer and more home to us. Report or imagination seldom raises any individual so high in our estimation as to disappoint us greatly when we are introduced to him: prejudice and malice constantly exaggerate defects beyond the reality. Ignorance alone makes monsters or bugbears: our actual acquaintances are all very common-place people. The thing is, that as a matter of hearsay or conjecture, we make abstractions of particular vices, and irritate ourselves against some particular quality or action of the person we dislike:—whereas, individuals are concrete existences, not arbitrary denominations or nicknames; and have innnumerable other qualities, good, bad, and in different, besides the damning feature with which we fill up the portrait or caricature, in our previous fancies. We can scarcely hate any one that we know. An acute observer complained, that if there was any one to whom he had a particular spite, and a wish to let him see it, the moment he came to sit down with him, his enmity was disarmed by some unforeseen circumstance. If it was a Quarterly Reviewer, he was in other respects like any other man. Suppose,

again, your adversary turns out a very ugly man, or wants an eye, you are balked in that way;—he is not what you expected, the object of your abstract hatred and implacable disgust. He may be a very disagreeable person, but he is no longer the same. If you come into a room where a man is, you find, in general, that he has a nose upon his face. "There's sympathy!" This alone is a diversion to your unqualified contempt. He is stupid, and says nothing, but he seems to have something in him when he laughs. You had conceived of him as a rank Whig or Tory—yet he talks upon other subjects. You knew that he was a virulent party-writer; but you find that the man himself is a tame sort of animal enough. He does not bite. That's something. In short, you can make nothing of it. Even opposite vices balance one another. A man may be pert in company, but he is also dull; so that you cannot, though you try, hate him cordially, merely for the wish to be offensive. He is a knave. Granted. You learn, on a nearer acquaintance, what you did not know before—that he is a fool as well; so you forgive him. On the other hand, he may be a profligate public character, and may make no secret of it; but he gives you a hearty shake by the hand, speaks kindly to servants, and supports an aged father and mother. Politics

apart, he is a very honest fellow. You are told that a person has carbuncles on his face; but you have ocular proofs that he is sallow, and pale as a ghost. This does not much mend the matter; but it blunts the edge of the ridicule, and turns your indignation against the inventor of the lie; but he is the editor of 'Blackwood's Magazine;' so you are just where you were. I am not very fond of anonymous criticism; I want to know who the author can be: but the moment I learn this, I am satisfied. Even the author of 'Waverley' would do well to come out of his disguise. It is the mask only that we dread and hate: the man may have something human about him! The notions, in short, which we entertain of people at a distance, or from partial representations, or from guess-work, are simple, uncompounded ideas, which answer to nothing in reality: those which we derive from experience are mixed modes, the only true, and, in general, the most favourable ones. Instead of naked deformity, or abstract perfection—

"Those faultless monsters which the world ne'er saw"—

"the web of our lives is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipt them not; and our vices would despair, if they were not encouraged by our virtues." This was truly and finely said

long ago, by one who knew the strong and weak points of human nature: but it is what sects, and parties, and those philosophers whose pride and boast it is to classify by nicknames, have yet to learn the meaning of!

ESSAY VIII.

ON CORPORATE BODIES.

"Corporate bodies have no soul."

CORPORATE bodies are more corrupt and profligate than individuals, because they have more power to do mischief, and are less amenable to disgrace or punishment. They feel neither shame, remorse, gratitude, nor good-will. The principle of private or natural conscience is extinguished in each individual (we have no moral sense in the breasts of others), and nothing is considered but how the united efforts of the whole (released from idle scruples) may be best directed to the obtaining of political advantages and privileges to be shared as common spoil. Each member reaps the benefit, and lays the blame, if there is any, upon the rest. The *esprit de corps* becomes the ruling passion of every corporate body, compared with which the motives of delicacy or decorum towards others are looked upon as being both impertinent and improper. If any person sets up a plea of this

sort in opposition to the rest, he is overruled, he gets ill-blood, and does no good: he is regarded as an interloper, a 'black sheep' in the flock, and is either 'sent to Coventry,' or obliged to acquiesce in the notions and wishes of those he associates and is expected to co-operate with. The refinements of private judgment are referred to and negatived in a committee of the whole body, while the projects and interests of the Corporation meet with a secret but powerful support in the self-love of the different members. Remonstrance—opposition, is fruitless, troublesome, invidious: it answers no one end: and a conformity to the sense of the company is found to be no less necessary to a reputation for good-fellowship than to a quiet life. "Self-love and social" here look like the same; and in consulting the interests of a particular class, which are also your own, there is even a show of public virtue. He who is a captious, impracticable, dissatisfied member of his little club or *coterie*, is immediately set down as a bad member of the community in general, as no friend to regularity and order, "a pestilent fellow," and one who is incapable of sympathy, attachment, or cordial co-operation in any department or undertaking. Thus the most refractory novice in such matters becomes weaned from his obligations to the larger society, which only breed him inconvenience without any ade-

quate recompense, and wedded to a nearer and dearer one, where he finds every kind of comfort and consolation. He contracts the vague and unmeaning character of Man into the more emphatic title of Freeman and Alderman. The claims of an undefined humanity sit looser and looser upon him, at the same time that he draws the bands of his new engagements closer and tighter about him. He loses sight, by degrees, of all common sense and feeling in the petty squabbles, intrigues, feuds, and airs, of affected importance to which he has made himself an accessary. He is quite an altered man. "Really the society were under considerable obligations to him in that last business;" that is to say, in some paltry job or under-hand attempt to encroach upon the rights, or dictate to the understandings, of the neighbourhood. In the mean time, they eat, drink, and carouse together. They wash down all minor animosities and unavoidable differences of opinion in pint-bumpers; and the complaints of the multitude are lost in the clatter of plates and the roaring of loyal catches at every quarter's meeting or mayor's feast. The town-hall reels with an unwieldy sense of self-importance: "the very stones prate" of processions: the common pump creaks in concert with the uncorking of bottles and tapping of beer-barrels: the market-cross looks big with authority. Everything has an

ambiguous, upstart, repulsive air. Circle within circle is formed, an *imperium in imperio:* and the business is to exclude from the first circle all the notions, opinions, ideas, interests, and pretensions, of the second. Hence there arises not only an antipathy to common sense and decency in those things where there is a real opposition of interest or clashing of prejudice, but it becomes a habit and a favourite amusement in those who are "dressed in a little brief authority," to thwart, annoy, insult, and harass others on all occasions where the least opportunity or pretext for it occurs. Spite, bickerings, back-biting, insinuations, lies, jealousies, nicknames, are the order of the day, and nobody knows what it's all about. One would think that the mayor, aldermen, and liverymen, were a higher and more select species of animals than their townsmen; though there is no difference whatever but in their gowns and staff of office! This is the essence of the *esprit de corps.* It is certainly not a very delectable source of contemplation or subject to treat of.

Public bodies are so far worse than the individuals composing them, because the *official* takes place of the *moral sense.* The nerves that in themselves were soft and pliable enough, and responded naturally to the touch of pity, when fastened into a machine of that sort, become callous and rigid, and throw off every extrane-

ous application that can be made to them with perfect apathy. An appeal is made to the ties of individual friendship: the body in general know nothing of them. A case has occurred which strongly called forth the compassion of the person who was witness of it: but the body (or any special deputation of them) were not present when it happened. These little weaknesses and "compunctious visitings of nature" are effectually guarded against, indeed, by the very rules and regulations of the society, as well as by its spirit. The individual is the creature of his feelings of all sorts, the sport of his vices and his virtues—like the fool in Shakespear, "motley's his proper wear:"—corporate bodies are dressed in a moral uniform; mixed motives do not operate there, frailty is made into a system, "diseases are turned into commodities." Only so much of any one's natural or genuine impulses can influence him in his artificial capacity as formally comes home to the aggregate conscience of those with whom he acts, or bears upon the interests (real or pretended), the importance, respectability, and professed objects of the society. Beyond that point the nerve is bound up, the conscience is seared, and the torpedo-touch of so much inert matter operates to deaden the best feelings and harden the heart. Laughter and tears are said to be the characteristic signs of humanity.

Laughter is common enough in such places as a set-off to the mock-gravity: but who ever saw a public body in tears? Nothing but a job or some knavery can keep them serious for ten minutes together.*

Such are the qualifications and the apprenticeship necessary to make a man tolerated, to enable him to pass as a cypher, or be admitted as a mere numerical unit, in any corporate body: to be a leader and dictator, he must be diplomatic in impertinence, and officious in every dirty work. He must not merely conform to established prejudices; he must flatter them. He must not merely be insensible to the demands of moderation and equity; he must be loud against them. He must not simply fall in with all sorts of contemptible cabals and intrigues; he must be indefatigable in fomenting

* We sometimes see a whole play-house in tears. But the audience at a theatre, though a public assembly, are not a public body. They are not incorporated into a frame-work of exclusive, narrow-minded interests of their own. Each individual looks out of his own insignificance at a scene, ideal perhaps, and foreign to himself, but true to nature; friends, strangers, meet on the common ground of humanity, and the tears that spring from their breasts are those which "sacred pity has engendered." They are a mixed multitude melted into sympathy by remote, imaginary events, not a combination cemented by petty views, and sordid, selfish prejudices.

them, and setting everybody together by the ears. He must not only repeat, but invent lies. He must write speeches and write hand-bills; he must be devoted to the wishes and objects of the society, its creature, its jackal, its busy-body, its mouth-piece, its prompter; he must deal in law-cases, in demurrers, in charters, in traditions, in common-places, in logic and rhetoric—in everything but common sense and honesty. He must (in Mr Burke's phrase) "disembowel himself of his natural entrails, and be stuffed with paltry, blurred sheets of parchment about the rights" of the privileged few. He must be a concentrated essence, a varnished, powdered representative of the vices, absurdities, hypocrisy, jealousy, pride, and pragmaticalness of his party. Such a one, by bustle and self-importance and puffing, by flattering one to his face, and abusing another behind his back, by lending himself to the weaknesses of some and pampering the mischievous propensities of others, will pass for a great man in a little society.

Age does not improve the morality of public bodies. They grow more and more tenacious of their idle privileges and senseless self-consequence. They get weak and obstinate at the same time. Those, who belong to them, have all the upstart pride and pettifogging spirit of their present character ingrafted on the venc-

rableness and superstitious sanctity of ancient institutions. They are naturally at issue, first with their neighbours, and next with their contemporaries, on all matters of common propriety and judgment. They become more attached to forms, the more obsolete they are; and the defence of every absurd and invidious distinction is a debt which (by implication) they owe to the dead as well as the living. What might once have been of serious practical utility they turn to farce, by retaining the letter when the spirit is gone: and they do this the more, the more glaring the inconsistency and want of sound reasoning; for they think they thus give proof of their zeal and attachment to the abstract principle on which old establishments exist, the ground of prescription and authority. "The greater the wrong, the greater the right," in all such cases. The *esprit de corps* does not take much merit to itself for upholding what is justifiable in any system, or the proceedings of any party, but for adhering to what is palpably injurious. You may exact the first from an enemy: the last is the province of a friend. It has been made a subject of complaint, that the champions of the Church, for example, who are advanced to dignities and honours, are hardly ever those who defend the common principles of Christianity, but those who volunteer to man the out-works, and set up ingenious excuses for

the questionable points, the ticklish places in the established form of worship, that is, for those which are attacked from without, and are supposed in danger of being undermined by stratagem, or carried by assault!

The great resorts and seats of learning often outlive in this way the intention of the founders, as the world outgrows them. They may be said to resemble antiquated coquettes of the last age, who think everything ridiculous and intolerable but what was in fashion when they were young, and yet are standing proofs of the progress of taste, and the vanity of human pretensions. Our universities are, in a great measure, become cisterns to hold, not conduits to disperse knowledge. The age has the start of them; that is, other sources of knowledge have been opened since their formation, to which the world have had access, and have drunk plentifully at those living fountains, but from which they are debarred by the tenor of their charter, and as a matter of dignity and privilege. They have grown poor, like the old grandees in some countries, by subsisting on the inheritance of learning, while the people have grown rich by trade. They are too much in the nature of fixtures in intellect: they stop the way in the road to truth; or at any rate (for they do not themselves advance) they can only be of service as a check-weight on the too hasty and rapid

career of innovation. All that has been invented or thought in the last two hundred years they take no cognizance of, or as little as possible; they are above it; they stand upon the ancient land marks, and will not budge; whatever was not known when they were first endowed, they are still in profound and lofty ignorance of. Yet in that period how much has been done in literature, arts, and science, of which (with the exception of mathematical knowledge, the hardest to gainsay or subject to the trammels of prejudice and barbarous *ipse dixits*) scarce any trace is to be found in the authentic modes of study, and legitimate inquiry, which prevail at either of our Universities! The unavoidable aim of all corporate bodies of learning is not to grow wise, or teach others wisdom, but to prevent any one else from being or seeming wiser than themselves; in other words, their infallible tendency is in the end to suppress inquiry and darken knowledge by setting limits to the mind of man, aud saying to his proud spirit, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther!' It would not be an unedifying experiment to make a collection of the titles of works published in the course of the year by Members of the Universities. If any attempt is to be made to patch up an idle system in policy or legislation, or church-government, it is by a Member of the University: if

any hashed-up speculation on an old exploded argument is to be brought forward "in spite of shame, in erring reason's spite," it is by a Member of the University: if a paltry project is ushered into the world for combining ancient prejudices with modern time-serving, it is by a Member of the University. Thus we get at a stated supply of annual Defences of the Sinking Fund, Thoughts on the Evils of Education, Treaties on Predestination, and Eulogies on Mr Malthus, all from the same source, and through the same vent. If they came from any other quarter nobody would look at them; but they have an *Imprimatur* from dulness and authority: we know that there is no offence in them; and they are stuck in the shop windows, and read (in the intervals of Lord Byron's works, or the Scotch novels) in cathedral towns and close boroughs!

It is, I understand and believe, pretty much the same in more modern institutions for the encouragement of the Fine Arts. The end is lost in the means: rules take place of nature and genius; cabal and bustle, and struggles for rank and precedence, supersede the study and the love of art. A Royal Academy is a kind of hospital and infirmary for the obliquities of taste and ingenuity—a receptacle where enthusiasm and originality stop and stagnate, and spread their influence no farther, instead of

being a school founded for genius, or a temple built to fame. The generality of those who wriggle, or fawn, or beg their way to a seat there, live on their certificate of merit to a good old age, and are seldom heard of afterwards. If a man of sterling capacity gets among them, and minds his own business, he is nobody; he makes no figure in council, in voting, in resolutions or speeches. If he comes forward with plans and views for the good of the Academy and the advancement of art, he is immediately set upon as a visionary, a fanatic, with notions hostile to the interest and credit of the existing members of the society. If he directs the ambition of the scholars to the study of History, this strikes at once at the emoluments of the profession, who are most of them (by God's will) portrait painters. If he eulogises the Antique, and speaks highly of the Old Masters, he is supposed to be actuated by envy to living painters and native talent. If, again, he insists on a knowledge of anatomy as essential to correct drawing, this would seem to imply a want of it in our most eminent designers. Every plan, suggestion, argument, that has the general purposes and principles of art for its object, is thwarted, scouted, ridiculed, slandered, as having a malignant aspect towards the profits and pretensions of the great mass of flourishing and respectable artists in the country. This leads

to irritation and ill-will on all sides. The obstinacy of the constituted authorities keeps pace with the violence and extravagance opposed to it; and they lay all the blame on the folly and mistakes they have themselves occasioned or increased. It is considered as a personal quarrel, not a public question; by which means the dignity of the body is implicated in resenting the slips and inadvertencies of its members, not in promoting their common and declared objects. In this sort of wretched *tracasserie* the Barrys and Haydons stand no chance with the Catons, the Tubbs, and the F——s. Sir Joshua even was obliged to hold himself aloof from them, and Fuseli passes as a kind of nondescript, or one of his own grotesques. The air of an academy, in short, is not the air of genius and immortality; it is too close and heated, and impregnated with the notions of the common sort. A man steeped in a corrupt atmosphere of this description is no longer open to the genial impulses of nature and truth, nor sees visions of ideal beauty, nor dreams of antique grace and grandeur, nor has the finest works of art continually hovering and floating through his uplifted fancy; but the images that haunt it are rules of the academy, charters, inaugural speeches, resolutions passed or rescinded, cards of invitation to a council-meeting.

or the annual dinner prize-medals, and the king's diploma, constituting him a gentleman and esquire. He "wipes out all trivial, fond records;" all romantic aspirations; "the Raphael grace, the Guido air;" and the commands of the academy alone "must live within the book and volume of his brain, unmixed with baser matter." It may be doubted whether any work of lasting reputation and universal interest can spring up in this soil, or ever has done in that of any academy. The last question is a matter of fact and history, not of mere opinion or prejudice; and may be ascertained as such accordingly. The mighty names of former times rose before the existence of academies; and the three greatest painters, undoubtedly, that this country has produced, Reynolds, Wilson, and Hogarth, were not "dandled and swaddled" into artists in any institution for the fine arts. I do not apprehend that the names of Chantrey or Wilkie (great as one, and considerable as the other of them is), can be made use of in any way to impugn the jet of this argument. We may find a considerable improvement in some of our artists, when they get out of the vortex for a time. Sir Thomas Lawrence is all the better for having been abstracted for a year or two from Somerset House; and Mr Dawe, they say, has

been doing wonders in the North. When will he return, and once more "bid Britannia rival Greece?"

Mr Canning somewhere lays it down as a rule, that corporate bodies are necessarily correct and pure in their conduct, from the knowledge which the individuals composing them have of one another, and the jealous vigilance they exercise over each other's motives and characters; whereas, people collected into mobs are disorderly and unprincipled from being utterly unknown and unaccountable to each other. This is a curious pass of wit. I differ with him in both parts of the dilemma. To begin with the first, and to handle it somewhat cavalierly, according to the model before us: we know, for instance, there is said to be honour among thieves, but very little honesty towards others. Their honour consists in the division of the booty, not in the mode of acquiring it: they do not (often) betray one another, but they will waylay a stranger, or knock out a traveller's brains: they may be depended on in giving the alarm when any of their posts are in danger of being surprised; and they will stand together for their ill-gotten gains to the last drop of their blood. Yet they form a distinct society, and are strictly responsible for their behaviour to one another and to their leader. They are not a mob, but a gang,

completely in one another's power and secrets. Their familiarity, however, with the proceedings of the corps, does not lead them to expect or to exact from it a very high standard of moral honesty; that is out of the question; but they are sure to gain the good opinion of their fellows by committing all sorts of depredations, fraud, and violence against the community at large. So (not to speak it profanely) some of Mr Canning's friends may be very respectable people in their way—"all honourable men"—but their respectability is confined within party-limits; every one does not sympathise in the integrity of their views; the understanding between them and the public is not well-defined or reciprocal. Or, suppose a gang of pickpockets hustle a passenger in the street, and the mob set upon them, and proceed to execute summary justice upon such as they can lay hands on, am I to conclude that the rogues are in the right, because theirs is a system of well-organised knavery, which they settled in the morning, with their eyes one upon the other, and which they regularly review at night, with a due estimate of each other's motives, character, and conduct in the business; and that the honest men are in the wrong, because they are a casual collection of unprejudiced, disinterested individuals, taken at a venture from the mass of the people, acting

without concert or responsibility, on the spur of the occasion, and giving way to their instantaneous impulses and honest anger? Mobs, in fact, then, are almost always right in their feelings, and often in their judgments, on this very account—that being utterly unknown to and disconnected with each other, they have no point of union or principle of co-operation between them, but the natural sense of justice recognised by all persons in common. They appeal, at the first meeting, not to certain symbols and watch-words privately agreed upon, like Free-Masons, but to the maxims and instincts proper to all the world. They have no other clew to guide them to their object but either the dictates of the heart or the universally understood sentiments of society, neither of which are likely to be in the wrong. The flame which bursts out and blazes from popular sympathy, is made of honest, but homely materials. It is not kindled by sparks of wit or sophistry, nor damped by the cold calculations of self-interest. The multitude may be wantonly set on by others, as is too often the case, or be carried too far in the impulse of rage and disappointment; but their resentment, when they are left to themselves, is almost uniformly, in the first instance, excited by some evident abuse and wrong; and the excesses into which they run arise from that very want of foresight

and regular system, which is a pledge of the uprightness and heartiness of their intentions. In short, the only class of persons to whom the above courtly charge of sinister and corrupt motives is not applicable, is that body of individuals which usually goes by the name of the PEOPLE!

ESSAY IX.

WHETHER ACTORS OUGHT TO SIT IN THE BOXES?

I THINK not; and that for the following reasons, as well as I can give them:—

Actors belong to the public: their persons are not their own property. They exhibit themselves on the stage: that is enough, without displaying themselves in the boxes of the theatre. I conceive that an actor, on account of the very circumstances of his profession, ought to keep himself as much *incognito* as possible. He plays a number of parts disguised, transformed into them as much as he can "by his so potent art," and he should not disturb this borrowed impression by unmasking before company, more than he can help. Let him go into the pit, if he pleases, to see—not into the first circle, to be seen. He is seen enough without that: he is the centre of an illusion that he is bound to support, both, as it appears to me, by a certain self-respect which should repel idle curiosity,

and by a certain deference to the public, in whom he has inspired certain prejudices which he is covenanted not to break. He represents the majesty of successive kings: he takes the responsibility of heroes and lovers on himself; the mantle of genius and nature falls on his shoulders; we "pile millions" of associations on him, under which he should be "buried quick," and not perk out an inauspicious face upon us, with a plain-cut coat, to say—"What fools you all were!—I am not Hamlet the Dane!"

It is very well and in strict propriety for Mr Mathews, in his AT HOME, after he has been imitating his inimitable Scotchwoman, to slip out as quick as lightning, and appear in the side box, shaking hands with our old friend Jack Bannister. It adds to our surprise at the versatility of his changes of place and appearance, and he had been before us in his own person during a great part of the evening. There was no harm done—no imaginary spell broken—no discontinuity of thought or sentiment. Mr Mathews is himself (without offence be it spoken) both a cleverer and more respectable man than many of the characters he represents. Not so when

> "O'er the stage the Ghost of Hamlet stalks,
> Othello rages, Desdemona mourns,
> And poor Monimia pours her soul in love."

A different feeling then prevails:—close, close the scene upon them, and never break that fine phantasmagoria of the brain. Or if it must be done at all, let us choose some other time and place for it: let no one wantonly dash the Circean cup from their lips, or dissolve the spirit of enchantment in the very palace of enchantment. Go, Mr ——, and sit somewhere else! What a thing it is, for instance, for any part of an actor's dress to come off unexpectedly while he is playing! What a cut it is upon himself and the audience! What an effort he has to recover himself, and struggle through this exposure of the naked truth! It has been considered as one of the triumphs of Garrick's tragic power, that once when he was playing Lear, his crown of straw came off, and nobody laughed or took the least notice, so much had he identified himself with the character. Was he, after this, to pay so little respect to the feelings which he inspired, as to tear off his tattered robes, and take the old, crazed king with him to play the fool in the boxes?

> "No; let him pass. Vex not his parting spirit,
> Nor on the rack of this rough world
> Stretch him out farther!"

Some lady is said to have fallen in love with Garrick from being present when he played the part of Romeo, on which he observed, that he

would undertake to cure her of her folly if she would only come and see him in Abel Drugger. So the modern tragedian and fine gentleman, by appearing to advantage, and conspicuously, *in propria persona*, may easily cure us of our predilection for all the principal characters he shines in. "Sir! do you think Alexander looked o' this fashion in his life-time, or was perfumed so? Had Julius Cæsar such a nose? or wore his frill as you do? You have slain I don't know how many heroes 'with a bare bodkin,' the gold pin in your shirt, and spoiled all the fine love speeches you will ever make by picking your teeth with that inimitable air!"

An actor, after having performed his part well, instead of courting farther distinction, should affect obscurity, and "steal most guilty-like away," conscious of admiration that he can support nowhere but in his proper sphere, and jealous of his own and others' good opinion of him, in proportion as he is a darling in the public eye. He cannot avoid attracting disproportionate attention: why should he wish to fix it on himself in a perfectly flat and insignificant part, viz. his own character? It was a bad custom to bring authors on the stage to crown them. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est.* Even professed critics, I think, should be shy of putting themselves forward to applaud loudly: any one in a crowd has "a voice potential" as

the press: it is either committing their pretensions a little indiscreetly, or confirming their own judgment by a clapping of hands. If you only go and give the cue lustily, the house seems in wonderful accord with your opinions. An actor, like a king, should only appear on state occasions. He loses popularity by too much publicity; or, according to the proverb, "familiarity breeds contempt." Both characters personate a certain abstract idea, are seen in a fictitious costume, and when they have "shuffled off this more than mortal coil," they had better keep out of the way—the acts and sentiments emanating from themselves will not carry on the illusion of our prepossessions. Ordinary transactions do not give scope to grace and dignity like romantic situations, or prepared pageants, and the *little* is apt to prevail over the *great*, if we come to count the instances.

The motto of a great actor should be *aut Cæsar aut nihil.* I do not see how with his crown, or plume of feathers, he can get through those little box-doors without stooping and squeezing his artificial importance to tatters. The entrance of the stage is arched so high "that *players* may jet through, and keep their gorgeous turbans on, without good-morrow to the gods!"

The top-tragedian of the day has too large and splendid a train following him to have room

for them in one of the dress boxes. When he appears there, it should be enlarged express for the occasion; for at his heels march the figures, in full costume, of Cato, and Brutus, and Cassius, and of him with the falcon eye, and Othello, and Lear, and crook-backed Richard, and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and numbers more, and demand entrance along with him, shadows to which he alone lends bodily substance! "The graves yawn and render up their dead to push us from our stools." There is a mighty bustle at the door, a gibbering and squeaking in the lobbies. An actor's retinue is imperial, it presses upon the imagination too much, and he should therefore slide unnoticed into the pit. Authors, who are in a manner his makers and masters, sit there contented—why should not he? "He is used to show himself." That, then, is the very reason he should conceal his person at other times. A habit of ostentation should not be reduced to a principle. If I had seen the late Gentleman Lewis fluttering in a prominent situation in the boxes, I should have been puzzled whether to think of him as the Copper Captain, or as Bobadil, or Ranger, or young Rapid, or Lord Foppington, or fifty other whimsical characters: then I should have got Munden and Quick, and a parcel more of them in my head, till "my brain would have been like a smoke-jack:" I should not have known what to

make of it; but if I had seen him in the pit, I should merely have eyed him with respectful curiosity, and have told every one that *that* was Gentleman Lewis. We should have concluded from the circumstance that he was a modest, sensible man: we all knew beforehand that he could show off whenever he pleased!

There is one class of performers that I think is quite exempt from the foregoing reasoning, I mean retired actors. Come when they will and where they will, they are welcome to their old friends. They have as good a right to sit in the boxes as children at the holidays. But they do not, somehow, come often. It is but a melancholy recollection with them:—

> ——— "Then sweet,
> Now sad to think on!"

Mrs Garrick still goes often, and hears the applause of her husband over again in the shouts of the pit. Had Mrs Pritchard or Mrs Clive been living, I am afraid we should have seen little of them—it would have been too home a feeling with them. Mrs Siddons seldom if ever goes, and yet she is almost the only thing left worth seeing there. She need not stay away on account of any theory that I can form. She is out of the pale of all theories, and annihilates all rules. Wherever she sits there is grace and grandeur, there is tragedy personified.

Her seat is the undivided throne of the Tragic Muse. She had no need of the robes, the sweeping train, the ornaments of the stage; in herself she is as great as any being she ever represented in the ripeness and plenitude of her power! I should not, I confess, have had the same paramount abstracted feeling at seeing John Kemble there, whom I venerate at a distance, and should not have known whether he was playing off the great man or the great actor:—

"A little more than kin, and less than kind."

I know it may be said, in answer to all this pretext of keeping the character of the player inviolate—"What is there more common, in fact, than for the hero of a tragedy to speak the prologue, or than for the heroine, who has been stabbed or poisoned, to revive, and come forward laughing in the epilogue?" As to the epilogue, it is spoken to get rid of the idea of the tragedy altogether, and to ward off the fury of the pit, who may be bent on its damnation. The greatest incongruity you can hit upon is, therefore, the most proper for this purpose. But I deny that the hero of a tragedy, or the principal character in it, is ever pitched upon to deliver the prologue. It is always, by prescription, some walking-shadow, some poor player, who cannot even spoil a part of any consequence. Is there not Mr Claremont always at hand for

this purpose, whom the late king pronounced three times to be "a bad actor?"* What is there in common between that accustomed wave of the hand, and the cocked hat under the arm, and any passion or person that can be brought forward on the stage? It is not that we can be said to acquire a prejudice against so harmless an actor as Mr Claremont; we are born with a prejudice against a speaker of prologues. It is an innate idea: a natural instinct: there is a particular organ in the brain provided for it. Do we not all hate a manager? It is not because he is insolent or impertinent, or fond of making ridiculous speeches, or a notorious puffer, or ignorant, or mean, or vain, but it is because we see him in a coat, waistcoat, and

* Mr Munden and Mr Claremont went one Sunday to Windsor to see the king. They passed with other spectators once or twice: at last his late majesty distinguished Munden in the crowd, and called him to him. After treating him with much cordial familiarity, the king said, "And pray, who is that with you?" Munden, with many congées and contortions of face, replied, "An please your majesty, it's Mr Claremont, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane."—"Oh! yes," said the king, "I know him well—a bad actor, a bad actor, a bad actor!" Why kings should repeat what they say three times is odd: their saying it once is quite enough. I have always liked Mr Claremont's face since I heard this anecdote, and perhaps the telling it may have the same effect on other people.

breeches. The stage is the world of fantasy: it is Queen Mab that has invited us to her revels there, and all that have to do with it should wear motley!

Lastly, there are some actors by profession, whose faces we like to see in the boxes or anywhere else; but it is because they are no actors, but rather gentlemen and scholars, and in their proper places in the boxes, or wherever they are. Does not an actor himself, I would ask, feel conscious and awkward in the boxes, if he thinks that he is known? And does he not sit there in spite of this uneasy feeling, and run the gauntlet of impertinent looks and whispers, only to get a little by-admiration, as he thinks? It is hardly to be supposed that he comes to see the play, the show. He must have enough of plays and finery. But he wants to see a favourite (perhaps a rival) actor in a striking part. Then the place for him to do this is the pit. Painters, I know, always get as close up to a picture they want to copy as they can; and I should imagine actors would want to do the same, in order to look into the texture and mechanism of their art. Even theatrical critics can make nothing of a part that they see from the boxes. If you sit in the stage-box, your attention is drawn off by the company and other circumstances. If you get to a distance (so as to be out of the reach of notice) you can neither

hear nor see well. For myself, I would as soon take a seat on the top of the Monument to give an account of a first appearance, as go into the second or third tier of boxes to do it. I went, but the other day, with a box ticket, to see Miss Fanny Brunton come out in Juliet, and Mr Macready make a first appearance in Romeo; and though I was told (by a tolerable judge) that the new Juliet was the most elegant figure on the stage, and that Mr Macready's Romeo was quite beautiful, I vow to God I knew nothing of it. So little could I tell of the matter, that at one time I mistook Mr Horrebow for Mr Abbot. I have seen Mr Kean play Sir Giles Overreach one night from the front of the pit, and a few nights after from the front boxes, facing the stage. It was another thing altogether. That which had been so lately nothing but flesh and blood, a living fibre, "instinct with fire" and spirit, was no better than a little fantoccini figure, darting backwards and forwards on the stage, starting, screaming, and playing a number of fantastic tricks before the audience. I could account, in the latter instance, for the little approbation of the performance manifested around me, and also for the general scepticism with respect to Mr Kean's acting, which has been said to prevail among those who cannot condescend to go into the

pit, and have not interest in the orchestra—to see him act. They may then stay away altogether. His face is the running comment on his acting, which reconciles the audience to it. Without that index to his mind, you are not prepared for the vehemence and suddenness of his gestures; his pauses are long, abrupt, and unaccountable, if not filled up by the expression; it is in the working of his face that you see the writhing and coiling up of the passions before they make their serpent-spring; the lightning of his eye precedes the hoarse burst of thunder from his voice.

One may go into the boxes, indeed, and criticise acting and actors with Sterne's stop-watch, but no otherwise—" 'And between the nominative case and the verb (which, as your lordship knows, should agree together in number, person, &c.) there was a full pause of a second and two-thirds.'—'But was the eye silent—did the look say nothing?'—'I looked only at the stop-watch, my lord.'—'Excellent critic!' "—If any other actor, indeed, goes to see Mr Kean act, with a view *to avoid imitation*, this may be the place, or rather it is the way to run into it, for you see only his extravagances and defects, which are the most easily carried away. Mr Mathews maytranslate him into an AT HOME even from the slips!—Distinguished actors then

ought, I conceive, to set the example of going into the pit, were it only for their own sakes. I remember a trifling circumstance, which I worked up at the time into a confirmation of this theory of mine, engrafted on old prejudice and tradition.* I had got into the middle of the pit, at considerable risk of broken bones, to see Mr Kean in one of his early parts, when I perceived two young men seated a little behind me, with a certain space left round them. They were dressed in the height of the fashion, in light drab-coloured great coats, and with their shirt-sleeves drawn down over their hands, at a time when this was not so common as it has since become. I took them for younger sons of some old family at least. One of them, that was very good-looking, I thought might be Lord Byron, and his companion might be Mr Hobhouse. They seemed to have wandered from another sphere of this our planet, to witness a masterly performance to the utmost advantage. This stamped the thing. They were, undoubtedly, young men of rank and fashion; but their taste was greater than their regard for appearances. The pit was, after all, the true

* The trunk-maker, I grant, in the Spectator's time, sat in the two-shilling gallery. But that was in the Spectator's time, and not in the days of Mr Smirke and Mr Wyatt.

resort of thorough-bred critics and amateurs. When there was anything worth seeing, this was the place; and I began to feel a sort of reflected importance in the consciousness that I also was a critic. Nobody sat near them—it would have seemed like an intrusion. Not a syllable was uttered.—They were two clerks in the Victualling office!

What I would insist on, then, is this—that for Mr Kean, or Mr Young, or Mr Macready, or any of those that are "cried out upon in the top of the compass" to obtrude themselves voluntarily or ostentatiously upon our notice, when they are *out of character*, is a solecism in theatricals. For them to thrust themselves forward before the scenes, is to drag us behind them against our will, than which nothing can be more fatal to a true passion for the stage, and which is a privilege that should be kept sacred for impertinent curiosity. Oh! while I live, let me not be admitted (under special favour) to an actor's dressing-room. Let me not see how Cato painted, or how Cæsar combed! Let me not meet the prompt boys in the passage, nor see the half-lighted candles stuck against the bare walls, nor hear the creaking of machines, or the fiddlers laughing; nor see a Columbine practising a pirouette in sober sadness, nor Mr Grimaldi's face drop from mirth

to sudden melancholy as he passes the side-scene, as if a shadow crossed it, nor witness the long-chinned generation of the pantomime sit twirling their thumbs, nor overlook the fellow who holds the candle for the moon in the scene between Lorenzo and Jessica! Spare me this insight into secrets I am not bound to know. The stage is not a mistress that we are sworn to undress. Why should we look behind the glass of fashion? Why should we prick the bubble that reflects the world, and turn it to a little soap and water? Trust a little to first appearances—leave something to fancy. I observe that the great puppets of the real stage, who themselves play a grand part, like to get into the boxes over the stage; where they see nothing from the proper point of view, but peep and pry into what is going on like a magpie looking into a marrow-bone. This is just like them. So they look down upon human life, of which they are ignorant. They see the exits and entrances of the players, something that they suspect is meant to be kept from th (for they think they are always liable to be imposed upon): the petty pageant of an hour ends with each scene long before the catastrophe, and the tragedy of life is turned to farce under their eyes. These people laugh loud at a pantomime, and are delighted with clowns and pantaloons.

They pay no attention to anything else. The stage-boxes exist in contempt of the stage and common sense. The private boxes, on the contrary, should be reserved as the receptacle for the officers of state and great diplomatic characters, who wish to avoid, rather than court popular notice!

ESSAY X.

ON THE DISADVANTAGES OF INTELLECTUAL SUPERIORITY.

THE chief disadvantage of knowing more and seeing farther than others, is not to be generally understood. A man is, in consequence of this, liable to start paradoxes, which immediately transport him beyond the reach of the common-place reader. A person speaking once in a slighting manner of a very original-minded man, received for answer—"He strides on so far before you, that he dwindles in the distance!"

Petrarch complains, that "Nature had made him different from other people"—*singular' d' altra genti.* The great happiness of life is, to be neither better nor worse than the general run of those you meet with. If you are beneath them, you are trampled upon; if you are above them, you soon find a mortifying level in their indifference to what you particularly pique yourself upon. What is the use of being moral in a

night-cellar, or wise in Bedlam? "To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand." So says Shakespear; and the commentators have not added that, under these circumstances, a man is more likely to become the butt of slander than the mark of admiration for being so. "How now, thou particular fellow?" * is the common answer to all such out-of-the-way pretensions. By not doing as those at Rome do, we cut ourselves off from good-fellowship and society. We speak another language, have notions of our own, and are treated as of a different species. Nothing can be more awkward than to intrude with any such far-fetched ideas among the common herd, who will be sure to

——"Stand all astonied, like a sort of steers,
'Mongst whom some beast of strange and foreign race
Unwares is chanced, far straying from his peers:
So will their ghastly gaze betray their hidden fears."

Ignorance of another's meaning is a sufficient cause of fear, and fear produces hatred: hence the suspicion and rancour entertained against all those who set up for greater refinement and wisdom than their neighbours. It is in vain to

* Jack Cade's salutation to one who tries to recommend himself by saying he can write and read.—See 'Henry VI,' Part Second.

think of softening down this spirit of hostility by simplicity of manners, or by condescending to persons of low estate. The more you condescend, the more they will presume upon it; they will fear you less, but hate you more; and will be the more determined to take their revenge on you for a superiority as to which they are entirely in the dark, and of which you yourself seem to entertain considerable doubts. All the humility in the world will only pass for weakness and folly. They have no notion of such a thing. They always put their best foot forward; and argue that you would do the same if you had any such wonderful talents as people say. You had better, therefore, play off the great man at once—hector, swagger, talk big, and ride the high horse over them: you may by this means extort outward respect or common civility; but you will get nothing (with low people) by forbearance and good-nature but open insult or silent contempt. Coleridge always talks to people about what they don't understand: I, for one, endeavour to talk to them about what they do understand, and find I only get the more ill-will by it. They conceive I do not think them capable of anything better; that I do not think it worth while, as the vulgar saying is, to "throw a word to a dog." I once complained of this to Coleridge, thinking it hard I should be sent to Coventry for not making a

prodigious display. He said, "As you assume a certain character, you ought to produce your credentials. It is a tax upon people's good nature to admit superiority of any kind, even where there is the most evident proof of it: but it is too hard a task for the imagination to admit it without any apparent ground at all."

There is not a greater error than to suppose that you avoid the envy, malice, and uncharitableness so common in the world, by going among people without pretensions. There are no people who have no pretensions; or the fewer their pretensions, the less they can afford to acknowledge yours without some sort of value received. The more information individuals possess, or the more they have refined upon any subject, the more readily can they conceive and admit the same kind of superiority to themselves that they feel over others. But from the low, dull, level sink of ignorance and vulgarity, no idea or love of excellence can arise. You think you are doing mighty well with them; that you are laying aside the buckram of pedantry and pretence, and getting the character of a plain, unassuming, good sort of fellow. It will not do. All the while that you are making these familiar advances, and wanting to be at your ease, they are trying to recover the wind of you. You may forget that you are an author, an artist, or what not—they do not forget that

they are nothing, nor bate one jot of their desire to prove you in the same predicament. They take hold of some circumstance in your dress; your manner of entering a room is different from that of other people; you do not eat vegetables —that's odd; you have a particular phrase, which they repeat, and this becomes a sort of standing joke; you look grave or ill; you talk, or are more silent than usual; you are in or out of pocket: all these petty, inconsiderable circumstances, in which you resemble, or are unlike other people, form so many counts in the indictment which is going on in their imaginations against you, and are so many contradictions in your character. In any one else they would pass unnoticed, but in a person of whom they had heard so much, they cannot make them out at all. Meanwhile, those things in which you may really excel, go for nothing, because they cannot judge of them. They speak highly of some book which you do not like, and therefore you make no answer. You recommend them to go and see some picture, in which they do not find much to admire. How are you to convince them that you are right? Can you make them perceive that the fault is in them, and not in the picture, unless you could give them your knowledge? They hardly distinguish the difference between a Correggio and a common daub. Does this bring you any nearer to an understanding?

The more you know of the difference, the more deeply you feel it, or the more earnestly you wish to convey it, the farther do you find yourself removed to an immeasurable distance from the possibility of making them enter into views and feelings of which they have not even the first rudiments. You cannot make them see with your eyes, and they must judge for themselves.

Intellectual is not like bodily strength. You have no hold of the understanding of others but by their sympathy. Your knowing, in fact, so much more about a subject does not give you a superiority, that is, a power over them, but only renders it the more impossible for you to make the least impression on them. Is it then an advantage to you? It may be, as it relates to your own private satisfaction, but it places a greater gulf between you and society. It throws stumbling-blocks in your way at every turn. All that you take most pride and pleasure in is lost upon the vulgar eye. What they are pleased with is a matter of indifference or of distaste to you. In seeing a number of persons turn over a portfolio of prints from different masters, what a trial it is to the patience, how it jars the nerves, to hear them fall into raptures at some commonplace flimsy thing, and pass over some divine expression of countenance without notice, or with a remark that it is very singular-looking?

How useless is it in such cases to fret or argue, or remonstrate? Is it not quite as well to be without all this hypercritcal, fastidious knowledge, and to be pleased or displeased as it happens, or struck with the first fault or beauty that is pointed out by others? I would be glad almost to change my acquaintance with pictures, with books, and, certainly, what I know of mankind, for anybody's ignorance of them!

It is recorded in the life of some worthy (whose name I forget) that he was one of those "who loved hospitality and respect:" and I profess to belong to the same classification of mankind. Civility is with me a jewel. I like a little comfortable cheer, and careless, indolent chat. I hate to be always wise, or aiming at wisdom. I have enough to do with literary cabals, questions, critics, actors, essay writing, without taking them out with me for recreation, and into all companies. I wish at these times to pass for a good-humored fellow; and good-will is all I ask in return to make good company. I do not desire to be always posing myself or others with the questions of fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute, &c. I must unbend sometimes. I must occasionally lie fallow. The kind of conversation that I affect most is what sort of a day it is, and whether it is likely to rain or hold up fine for to-morrow. This I consider as enjoying the *otium cum dignitate*, as

the end and privilege of a life of study. I would resign myself to this state of easy indifference, but I find I cannot. I must maintain a certain pretension, which is far enough from my wish. I must be put on my defence, I must take up the gauntlet continually, or I find I lose ground. "I am nothing if not critical." While I am thinking what o'clock it is, or how I came to blunder in quoting a well-known passage, as if I had done it on purpose, others are thinking whether I am not really as dull a fellow as I am sometimes said to be. If a drizzling shower patters against the windows, it puts me in mind of a mild spring rain, from which I retired twenty years ago, into a little public house near Wem in Shropshire, and while I saw the plants and shrubs before the door imbibe the dewy moisture, quaffed a glass of sparkling ale, and walked home in the dusk of evening, brighter to me than noon-day suns at present are! Would I indulge this feeling? In vain. They ask me what news there is, and stare if I say I don't know. If a new actress has come out, why must I have seen her? If a new novel has appeared, why must I have read it? I, at one time, used to go and take a hand at cribbage with a friend, and afterwards discuss a cold sirloin of beef, and throw out a few lack-a-daisical remarks, in a way to please myself, but it would not do long. I set up little pretension, and therefore

the little that I did set up was taken from me. As I said nothing on that subject myself, it was continually thrown in my teeth that I was *an author*. From having me at this disadvantage, my friend wanted to peg on a hole or two in the game, and was displeased if I would not let him. If I won of him, it was hard he should be beat by an author. If he won, it would be strange if he did not understand the game better than I did. If I mentioned my favourite game of rackets, there was a general silence, as if this was my weak point. If I complained of being ill, it was asked why I made myself so? If I said such an actor had played a part well, the answer was, there was a different account in one of the newspapers. If any allusion was made to men of letters, there was a suppressed smile. If I told a humorous story, it was difficult to say whether the laugh was at me or at the narrative. The wife hated me for my ugly face: the servants because I could not always get them tickets for the play, and because they could not tell exactly what an author meant. If a paragraph appeared against anything I had written, I found it was ready there before me, and I was to undergo a regular roasting. I submitted to all this till I was tired, and then I gave it up.

One of the miseries of intellectual pretensions is, that nine-tenths of those you come in contact with do not know whether you are an impostor

or not. I dread that certain anonymous criticisms should get into the hands of servants where I go, or that my hatter or shoemaker should happen to read them, who cannot possibly tell whether they are well or ill founded. The ignorance of the world leaves one at the mercy of its malice. There are people whose good opinion or good will you want, setting aside all literary pretensions; and it is hard to lose by an ill report (which you have no means of rectifying) what you cannot gain by a good one. After a diatribe in the 'Courier' (which is taken in by a gentleman who occupies my old apartments on the first floor) my landlord brings me up his bill (of some standing), and on my offering to give him so much in money, and a note of hand for the rest, shakes his head, and says, he is afraid he could make no use of it. Soon after, the daughter comes in, and, on my mentioning the circumstance carelessly to her, replies gravely, "that indeed her father has been almost ruined by bills." This is the unkindest cut of all. It is in vain for me to endeavour to explain that the publication in which I am abused is a mere government engine—an organ of a political faction. They know nothing about that. They only know such and such imputations are thrown out; and the more I try to remove them, the more they think there is some truth in them. Perhaps the people of the

house are strong Tories—government-agents of some sort. Is it for me to enlighten their ignorance? If I say, I once wrote a thing called 'Prince Maurice's Parrot,' and an 'Essay on the Regal Character,' in the former of which allusion is made to a noble marquis, and in the latter to a great personage (so at least, I am told, it has been construed), and that Mr Croker has peremptory instructions to retaliate; they cannot conceive what connexion there can be between me and such distinguished characters. I can get no farther. Such is the misery of pretensions beyond your situation, and which are not backed by any external symbols of wealth or rank, intelligible to all mankind.

The impertinence of admiration is scarcely more tolerable than the demonstrations of contempt. I have known a person, whom I had never seen before, besiege me all dinner-time with asking, what articles I had written in the 'Edinburgh Review?' I was at last ashamed to answer to my splendid sins in that way. Others will pick out something not yours, and say, they are sure no one else could write it. By the first sentence they can always tell your style. Now I hate my style to be known; as I hate all idiosyncrasy. These obsequious flatterers could not pay me a worse compliment. Then there are those who make a point of reading everything you write (which is fulsome); while others,

more provoking, regularly lend your works to a friend as soon as they receive them. They pretty well know your notions on the different subjects, from having heard you talk about them. Besides, they have a greater value for your personal character than they have for your writings. You explain things better in a common way, when you are not aiming at effect. Others tell you of the faults they have heard found with your last book, and that they defend your style in general from a charge of obscurity. A friend once told me of a quarrel he had had with a near relation, who denied that I knew how to spell the commonest words. These are comfortable confidential communications, to which authors, who have their friends and excusers, are subject. A gentleman told me, that a lady had objected to my use of the word *learneder*, as bad grammar. He said, he thought it a pity that I did not take more care, but that the lady was perhaps prejudiced, as her husband held a government office. I looked for the word, and found it in a motto from Butler. I was piqued, and desired him to tell the fair critic that the fault was not in me, but in one who had far more wit, more learning, and loyalty than I could pretend to. Then, again, some will pick out the flattest thing of yours they can find, to load it with panegyrics; and others tell you (by way of letting you see how high they rank your

capacity), that your best passages are failures. Lamb has a knack of tasting (or as he would say, *palating*) the insipid: Leigh Hunt has a trick of turning away from the relishing morsels you put on his plate. There is no getting the start of some people. Do what you will, they can do it better; meet with what success you may, their own good opinion stands them in better stead, and runs before the applause of the world. I once showed a person of this over-weening turn (with no small triumph, I confess) a letter of a very flattering description I had received from the celebrated Count Stendhal, dated Rome. He returned it with a smile of indifference, and said, he had had a letter from Rome himself the day before, from his friend S——! I did not think this "germane to the matter." Godwin pretends I never wrote anything worth a farthing but my answers to Vetus, and that I fail altogether when I attempt to write an essay, or anything in a short compass.

What can one do in such cases? Shall I confess a weakness? The only set-off I know to these rebuffs and mortifications, is sometimes in an accidental notice or involuntary mark of distinction from a stranger. I feel the force of Horace's *digito monstrari*—I like to be pointed out in the street, or to hear people ask in Mr Powell's court, *which is Mr Hazlitt?* This is to me a pleasing extension of one's personal

identity. Your name so repeated leaves an echo like music on the ear: it stirs the blood like the sound of a trumpet. It shows that other people are curious to see you: that they think of you, and feel an interest in you without your knowing it. This is a bolster to lean upon; a lining to your poor, shivering, threadbare opinion of yourself. You want some such cordial to exhausted spirits, and relief to the dreariness of abstract speculation. You are something; and, from occupying a place in the thoughts of others, think less contemptuously of yourself. You are the better able to run the gauntlet of prejudice and vulgar abuse. It is pleasant in this way to have your opinion quoted against yourself, and your own sayings repeated to you as good things. I was once talking with an intelligent man in the pit, and criticising Mr Knight's performance of Filch. "Ah!" he said, "little Simmons was the fellow to play that character." He added, "There was a most excellent remark made upon his acting it in the EXAMINER (I think it was)—*That he looked as if he had the gallows in one eye and a pretty girl in the other.*" I said nothing, but was in remarkably good humour the rest of the evening. I have seldom been in a company where fives-playing has been talked of, but some one has asked, in the course of it, "Pray did any one ever see an account of one Cavanagh, that appeared some time back in

most of the papers? Is it known who wrote it?" These are trying moments. I had a triumph over a person, whose name I will not mention, on the following occasion. I happened to be saying something about Burke, and was expressing my opinion of his talents in no measured terms, when this gentleman interrupted me by saying, he thought, for his part, that Burke had been greatly over-rated, and then added, in a careless way, "Pray did you read a character of him in the last number of the Edinburgh Review?"—"I wrote it!"—I could not resist the antithesis, but was afterwards ashamed of my momentary petulance. Yet no one, that I find, ever spares me.

Some persons seek out and obtrude themselves on public characters, in order, as it might seem, to pick out their failings, and afterwards betray them. Appearances are for it, but truth and a better knowledge of nature are against this interpretation of the matter. Sycophants and flatterers are undesignedly treacherous and fickle. They are prone to admire inordinately at first, and not finding a constant supply of food for this kind of sickly appetite, take a distaste to the object of their idolatry. To be even with themselves for their credulity, they sharpen their wits to spy out faults, and are delighted to find that this answers better than their first employment. It is a course of study, "lively,

audible, and full of vent." They have the organ of wonder and the organ of fear in a prominent degree. The first requires new objects of admiration to satisfy its uneasy cravings: the second makes them crouch to power wherever its shifting standard appears, and willing to curry favour with all parties, and ready to betray any out of sheer weakness and servility. I do not think they mean any harm. At least, I can look at this obliquity with indifference in my own particular case. I have been more disposed to resent it as I have seen it practised upon others, where I have been better able to judge of the extent of the mischief, and the heartlessness and idiot folly it discovered.

I do not think great intellectual attainments are any recommendation to the women. They puzzle them, and are a diversion to the main question. If scholars talk to ladies of what they understand, their hearers are none the wiser: if they talk of other things, they only prove themselves fools. The conversation between Angelica and Foresight, in 'Love for Love,' is a receipt in full for all such overstrained nonsense: while he is wandering among the signs of the zodiac, she is standing a tip-toe on the earth. It has been remarked that poets do not choose mistresses very wisely. I believe it is not choice but necessity. If they could throw the handkerchief like the Grand Turk, I ima-

gine we should see scarce mortals, but rather goddesses surrounding their steps, and each exclaiming, with Lord Byron's own Ionian maid—

> "So shalt thou find me ever at thy side,
> Here and hereafter, if the last may be!"

Ah! no, these are bespoke, carried off by men of mortal, not ethereal mould, and thenceforth the poet, from whose mind the ideas of love and beauty are inseparable as dreams from sleep, goes on the forlorn hope of the passion, and dresses up the first Dulcinea that will take compassion on him, in all the colours of fancy. What boots it to complain if the delusion lasts for life, and the rainbow still paints its form in the cloud?

There is one mistake I would wish, if possible, to correct. Men of letters, artists, and others, not succeeding with women in a certain rank of life, think the objection is to their want of fortune, and that they shall stand a better chance by descending lower, where only their good qualities or talents will be thought of. Oh! worse and worse. The objection is to themselves, not to their fortune—to their abstraction, to their absence of mind, to their unintelligible and romantic notions. Women of education may have a glimpse of their meaning, may get a clue to their character, but to all

others they are thick darkness. If the mistress smiles at their *ideal* advances, the maid will laugh outright; she will throw water over you, get her little sister to listen, send her sweetheart to ask you what you mean, will set the village or the house upon your back; it will be a farce, a comedy, a standing jest for a year, and then the murder will out. Scholars should be sworn at Highgate. They are no match for chambermaids, or wenches at lodging houses. They had better try their hands on heiresses or ladies of quality. These last have high notions of themselves that may fit some of your epithets! They are above mortality, so are your thoughts! But with low life, trick, ignorance, and cunning, you have nothing in common. Whoever you are, that think you can make a compromise or a conquest there by good nature, or good sense, be warned by a friendly voice, and retreat in time from the unequal contest.

If, as I have said above, scholars are no match for chambermaids, on the other hand, gentlemen are no match for blackguards. The former are on their honour, act on the square; the latter take all advantages, and have no idea of any other principle. It is astonishing how soon a fellow without education will learn to cheat. He is impervious to any ray of liberal knowledge; his understanding is

"Not pierceable by power of any star"—

but it is porous to all sorts of tricks, chicanery, stratagems, and knavery, by which anything is to be got. Mrs Peachum, indeed, says, that "to succeed at the gaming table, the candidate should have the education of a nobleman." I do not know how far this example contradicts my theory. I think it is a rule that men in business should not be taught other things. Any one will be almost sure to make money who has no other idea in his head. A college education, or intense study of abstract truth, will not enable a man to drive a bargain, to over-reach another, or even to guard himself from being over-reached. As Shakespear says, that "to have a good face is the effect of study, but reading and writing come by nature:" so it might be argued, that to be a knave is the gift of fortune, but to play the fool to advantage it is necessary to be a learned man. The best politicians are not those who are deeply grounded in mathematical or in ethical science. Rules stand in the way of expediency. Many a man has been hindered from pushing his fortune in the world by an early cultivation of his moral sense, and has repented of it at leisure during the rest of his life. A shrewd man said of my father, that he would not send a son of his to school to him on any account, for that by teaching him to speak the truth, he would disqualify him from getting his living in the world!

It is hardly necessary to add any illustration to prove that the most original and profound thinkers are not always the most successful or popular writers. This is not merely a temporary disadvantage; but many great philosophers have not only been scouted while they were living, but forgotten as soon as they were dead. The name of Hobbes is perhaps sufficient to explain this assertion. But I do not wish to go farther into this part of the subject, which is obvious in itself. I have said, I believe, enough to take off the air of paradox which hangs over the title of this Essay.

ESSAY XI.

ON PATRONAGE AND PUFFING.

"A gentle usher, Vanity by name."—SPENSER.

A LADY was complaining to a friend of mine of the credulity of people in attending to quack advertisements, and wondering who could be taken in by them—"for that she had never bought but one half-guinea bottle of Dr ——'s Elixir of Life, and it had done her no sort of good!" This anecdote seemed to explain pretty well what made it worth the doctor's while to advertise his wares in every newspaper in the kingdom. He would no doubt be satisfied if every delicate, sceptical invalid, in his majesty's dominions, gave his Elixir one trial, merely to show the absurdity of the thing. We affect to laugh at the folly of those who put faith in nostrums, but are willing to see ourselves whether there is any truth in them.

There is a strong tendency in the human mind to flatter itself with secret hopes, with

some lucky reservation in our own favour, though reason may point out the grossness of the trick in general; and, besides, there is a wonderful power in words, formed into regular propositions, and printed in capital letters, to draw the assent after them, till we have proof of their fallacy. The ignorant and idle believe what they read, as Scotch philosophers demonstrate the existence of a material world, and other learned propositions, from the evidence of their senses. The ocular proof is all that is wanting in either case. As hypocrisy is said to be the highest compliment to virtue, the art of lying is the strongest acknowledgment of the force of truth. We can hardly BELIEVE a thing to be a lie, though we KNOW it to be so. The "puff direct," even as it stands in the columns of the 'Times' newspaper, branded with the title of Advertisement before it, claims some sort of attention and respect for the merits that it discloses, though we think the candidate for public favour and support has hit upon (perhaps) an injudicious way of laying them before the world. Still there may be something in them; and even the outrageous improbability and extravagance of the statement on the very face of it, stagger us, and leave a hankering to inquire farther into it, because we think the advertiser would hardly have the impudence to hazard such barefaced absurdities without some founda-

tion. Such is the strength of the association between words and things in the mind—so much oftener must our credulity have been justified by the event than imposed upon. If every second story we heard was an invention, we should lose our mechanical disposition to trust to the meaning of sounds, just as when we have met with a number of counterfeit pieces of coin, we suspect good ones; but our implicit assent to what we hear is a proof how much more sincerity and good faith there is in the sum total of our dealings with one another, than artifice and imposture.

"To elevate and surprise" is the great art of quackery and puffing; to raise a lively and exaggerated image in the mind, and take it by surprise before it can recover breath, as it were; so that by having been caught in the trap, it is unwilling to retract entirely—has a secret desire to find itself in the right, and a determination to see whether it is or not. Describe a picture as LOFTY, IMPOSING, and GRAND, these words excite certain ideas in the mind like the sound of a trumpet which are not to be quelled, except by seeing the picture itself, nor even then if it is viewed by the help of a catalogue, written expressly for the occasion by the artist himself. It is not to be supposed that HE would say such things of his picture, unless they were allowed by all the world; and he repeats them, on this

gentle understanding, till all the world allows them.* So reputation runs in a vicious circle, and merit limps behind it, mortified and abashed at its own insignificance. It has been said that the test of fame or popularity is to consider the number of times your name is repeated by others, or is brought to their recollection in the course of a year. At this rate, a man has his reputation in his own hands, and by the help of puffing and the press, may forestal the voice of posterity, and stun the "groundling" ear of his contemporaries. A name let off in your hearing continually, with some bouncing epithet affixed to it, startles you like the report of a pistol close at your ear; you cannot help the effect upon the imagination, though you know it is perfectly harmless—*vox et prœterea nihil.* So, if you see the same name staring you in the face in great letters, at the corner of every street, you involuntarily think the owner of it must be a great man to occupy so large a space in the eye of the town. The appeal is made, in the first instance, to the senses, but it sinks below the surface into the mind. There are some, indeed, who publish their own disgrace, and make their names a common by-word and

* It is calculated that West cleared some hundred pounds by the catalogues that sold of his great picture of Death riding on the Pale Horse.

nuisance, notoriety being all that they want. A quack gets himself surreptitiously dubbed Doctor or Knight; and though you may laugh in his face, it pays expenses. Parolles and his drum typify many a modern adventurer, and court-candidate, for unearned laurels and unblushing honours. Of all puffs, lottery puffs are the most ingenious and most innocent. A collection of them would make an amusing *Vade mecum*. They are still various and the same, with that infinite *ruse* with which they lull the reader at the outset out of all suspicion, the insinuating turn in the middle, the home-thrust at the ruling passion at last, by which your spare cash is conjured clean out of the pocket in spite of resolution by the same stale, well-known thousandth-time repeated artifice of "All prizes and No blanks"—a self-evident imposition! Nothing, however, can be a stronger proof of the power of fascinating the public judgment through the eye alone. I know a gentleman who amassed a considerable fortune (so as to be able to keep his carriage) by printing nothing but lottery placards and hand-bills of a colossal size. Another friend of mine (of no mean talents) was applied to (a snug thing in the way of business) to write regular lottery-puffs for a large house in the city, and on having a parcel of samples returned on his hands as done in too severe and terse a style, complained quaintly enough, "That modest merit never

could succeed!" Even Lord Byron, as he tells us, has been accused of writing lottery-puffs. There are various ways of playing one's self off before the public, and keeping one's name alive. The newspapers, the lamp-posts, the walls of empty houses, the shutters of windows, the blank covers of magazines and reviews, are open to every one. I have heard of a man of literary celebrity sitting in his study writing letters of remonstrance to himself, on the gross defects of a plan of education he had just published, and which remained unsold on the bookseller's counter. Another feigned himself dead in order to see what would be said of him in the newspapers, and to excite a sensation in this way. A flashy pamphlet has been run to a five-and-thirtieth edition, and thus ensured the writer a "deathless date" among political charlatans, by regularly striking off a new title-page to every fifty or a hundred copies that were sold. This is a vile practice. It is an erroneous idea got abroad (and which I will contradict here) that paragraphs are paid for in the leading Journals. It is quite out of question. A favourable notice of an author, an actress, &c., may be inserted through interest or to oblige a friend, but it must invariably be done for love, not money!

When I formerly had to do with these sort of critical verdicts, I was generally sent out of the way when any *debutant* had a friend at court,

and was to be tenderly handled. For the rest, or those of robust constitutions, I had *carte blanche* given me. Sometimes I ran out of the course, to be sure. Poor Perry! what bitter complaints he used to make, that by running-a-muck at lords and Scotchmen I should not leave him a place to dine out at! The expression of his face at these moments, as if he should shortly be without a friend in the world, was truly pitiable. What squabbles we used to have about Kean and Miss Stephens, the only theatrical favourites I ever had! Mrs Billington had got some notion that Miss Stephens would never make a singer, and it was the torment of Perry's life (as he told me in confidence) that he could not get any two people to be of the same opinion on any one point. I shall not easily forget bringing him my account of her first appearance in the 'Beggar's Opera.' I have reason to remember that article: it was almost the last I ever wrote with any pleasure to myself. I had been down on a visit to my friends near Chertsey, and, on my return, had stopped at an inn at Kingston-upon-Thames, where I had got the 'Beggar's Opera,' and had read it over night. The next day I walked cheerfully to town. It was a fine sunny morning, in the end of autumn, and as I repeated the beautiful song, "Life knows no return of spring," I meditated my next day's criticism, trying to do all the justice

I could to so inviting a subject. I was not a little proud of it by anticipation. I had just then begun to stammer out my sentiments on paper, and was in a kind of honey-moon of authorship. But soon after, my final hopes of happiness, and of human liberty, were blighted nearly at the same time; and since then I have had no pleasure in anything:—

"And Love himself can flatter me no more."

It was not so ten years since (ten short years since.—Ah! how fast those years run that hurry us away from our last fond dream of bliss!) when I loitered along thy green retreats, oh! Twickenham, and conned over (with enthusiastic delight) the checquered view, which one of thy favourites drew of human life! I deposited my account of the play at the 'Morning Chronicle' office in the afternoon, and went to see Miss Stephens as Polly. Those were happy times in which she first came out in this character, in Mandane, where she sang the delicious air, "If o'er the cruel tyrant, Love" (so as it can never be sung again) in 'Love in a Village,' where the scene opened with her and Miss Matthews in a painted garden of roses and honeysuckles, and "Hope, thou nurse of young Desire," thrilled from two sweet voices in turn. Oh! may my ears sometimes still drink the same

sweet sounds, embalmed with the spirit of youth, of health, and joy, but in the thoughts of an instant, but in a dream of fancy, and I shall hardly need to complain! When I got back, after the play, Perry called out, with his cordial, grating voice, "Well, how did she do?" and on my speaking in high terms, answered that, "he had been to dine with his friend the Duke, that some conversation had passed on the subject, he was afraid it was not the thing, it was not the true *sostenuto* style; but as I had written the article" (holding my peroration on the 'Beggar's Opera' carelessly in his hand) "it might pass!" I could perceive that the rogue licked his lips at it, and had already in imagination "bought golden opinions of all sorts of people" by this very criticism, and I had the satisfaction the next day to meet Miss Stephens coming out of the Editor's room, who had been to thank him for his very flattering account of her.

I was sent to see Kean the first night of his performance in Shylock, when there were about a hundred people in the pit, but from his masterly and spirited delivery of the first striking speech, "On such a day you called me dog," &c. I perceived it was a hollow thing. So it was given out in the 'Chronicle,' but Perry was continually at me as other people were at him, and was afraid it would not last. It was to no purpose I said IT WOULD LAST: yet I am in the right hitherto. It has been said, ridiculously, that

Mr Kean was written up in the 'Chronicle.' I beg leave to state my opinion that no actor can be written up or down by a paper. An author may be puffed into notice, or damned by criticism, because his book may not have been read. An artist may be over-rated, or undeservedly decried, because the public is not much accustomed to see or judge of pictures. But an actor is judged by his peers, the play-going public, and must stand or fall by his own merits or defects. The critic may give the tone or have a casting voice where popular opinion is divided; but he can no more force that opinion either way, or wrest it from its base in common-sense and feeling than he can move Stonehenge. Mr Kean had, however, physical disadvantages and strong prejudices to encounter, and so far the liberal and independent part of the press might have been of service in helping him to his seat in the public favour. May he long keep it with dignity and firmness! *

* I cannot say how in this respect it might have fared if Mr Mudford, a fat gentleman, who might not have "liked yon lean and hungry Roscius," had continued in the theatrical department of Mr Perry's paper at the time of this actor's first appearance; but I had been put upon this duty just before, and afterwards Mr Mudford's *spare* talents were not in much request. This, I believe, is the reason why he takes pains every now and then to inform the readers of the 'Courier' that it is impossible for any one to understand a word that I write.

It was pretended by the Covent-Garden people, and some others at the time, that Mr Kean's popularity was a mere effect of love of novelty, a nine days' wonder, like the rage after Master Betty's acting, and would be as soon over. The comparison did not hold. Master Betty's acting was so far wonderful, and drew crowds to see it as a mere singularity, because he was a boy. Mr Kean was a grown man, and there was no rule or precedent established in the ordinary course of nature why some other man should not appear in tragedy as great as John Kemble. Farther, Master Betty's acting was a singular phenomenon, but it was also as beautiful as it was singular. I saw him in the part of Douglas, and he seemed almost like "some gay creature of the element," moving about gracefully, with all the flexibility of youth, and murmuring Æolian sounds with plaintive tenderness. I shall never forget the way in which he repeated the line in which Young Norval says, speaking of the fate of two brothers :—

"And in my mind happy was he that died!"

The tones fell and seemed to linger prophetic on my ear. Perhaps the wonder was made greater than it was. Boys at that age can often read remarkably well, and certainly are not without natural grace and sweetness of voice. The Westminster school-boys are a better com-

pany of comedians than we find at most of our theatres. As to the understanding a part like Douglas, at least, I see no difficulty on that score. I myself used to recite the speech in Enfield's 'Speaker' with good emphasis and discretion when at school, and entered, about the same age, into the wild sweetness of the sentiments in Mrs Radcliffe's 'Romance of the Forest,' I am sure, quite as much as I should do now. Yet the same experiment has been often tried since, and has uniformly failed.*

It was soon after this that Coleridge returned from Italy, and he got one day into a long tirade to explain what a ridiculous farce the whole

* I (not very long ago) had the pleasure of spending an evening with Mr Betty, when we had some "good talk" about the good old times of acting. I wanted to insinuate that I had been a sneaking admirer, but could not bring it in. As, however, we were putting on our great coats down stairs, I ventured to break the ice by saying, "There is one actor of that period of whom we have not made honourable mention; I mean Master Betty." "Oh!" he said, "I have forgot all that." I replied that he might, but that I could not forget the pleasure I had had in seeing him. On which he turned off, and shaking his sides heartily, and with no measured demand upon his lungs, called out, "Oh, memory! memory!" in a way that showed he felt the full force of the allusion. I found afterwards that the subject did not offend, and we were to have drunk some Burton ale together the following evening, but were prevented. I hope he will consider that the engagement still stands good

was, and how all the people abroad were shocked at the gullibility of the English nation, who on this and every other occasion were open to the artifices of all sorts of quacks, wondering how any persons with the smallest pretensions to common-sense could for a moment suppose that a boy could act the characters of men without any of their knowledge, their experience, or their passions. We made some faint resistance, but in vain. The discourse then took a turn, and Coleridge began a laboured eulogy on some promising youth, the son of an English artist, whom he had met in Italy, and who had wandered all over the Campagna with him, whose talents, he assured us, were the admiration of all Rome, and whose early designs had almost all the grace and purity of Raphael's. At last some one interrupted the endless theme by saying a little impatiently, "Why just now you would not let us believe our own eyes and ears about young Betty, because you have a theory against premature talents, and now you start a boy phenomenon, that nobody knows anything about but yourself—a young artist that, you tell us, is to rival Raphael!" The truth is, we like to have something to admire ourselves, as well as to make other people gape and stare at; but then it must be a discovery of our own, an idol of our own making and setting up:—if others stumble on

the discovery before us, or join in crying it up to the skies, we then set to work to prove that this is a vulgar delusion, and show our sagacity and freedom from prejudice by pulling it in pieces with all the coolness imaginable. Whether we blow the bubble or crush it in our hands, vanity and the desire of empty distinction are equally at the bottom of our sanguine credulity or fastidious scepticism. There are some who always fall in with the fashionable prejudice as others affect singularity of opinion on all such points, according as they think they have more or less wit to judge for themselves.

If a little varnishing and daubing, a little puffing and quacking, and giving yourself a good name, and getting a friend to speak a word for you, is excusable in any profession, it is, I think, in that of painting. Painting is an occult science, and requires a little ostentation and mock-gravity in the professor. A man may here rival Katterfelto, " with his hair on end at his own wonders, wondering for his bread;" for, if he does not, he may in the end go without it. He may ride on a high trotting horse, in green spectacles, and attract notice to his person any how he can, if he only works hard at his profession. If " it only is when he is out he is acting," let him make the fools stare, but give others something worth looking at. Good Mr Carver and Gilder, good Mr Printer's

Devil, good Mr Bill-sticker, "do me your offices" unmolested! Painting is a plain ground, and requires a great many heraldic quarterings and facings to set it off. Lay on, and do not spare. No man's merit can be fairly judged of, if he is not known; and how can he be known, if he keeps entirely in the background? * A great name in art goes but a little way, is chilled as it creeps along the surface of the world, without something to revive and make it blaze out with fresh splendour. Fame is here almost obscurity. It is long before your name affixed to a sterling design will be spelt out by an undiscerning, regardless public. Have it proclaimed, therefore, as a necessary precaution, by sound of trumpet at the corners of the street, let it be stuck as a label in your mouth, carry it on a placard at your back. Otherwise, the world will never trouble themselves about you, or will very soon forget you. A celebrated artist of the present day, whose name is engraved at the bottom of some of the most touching specimens of English art, once had a frame-maker call on him, who, on entering his room, exclaimed with some surprise, "What,

* Sir Joshua, who was not a vain man, purchased a tawdry sheriff's carriage, soon after he took his house in Leicester fields, and desired his sister to ride about in it, in order that people might ask, "Whose it was?" and the answer would be, "It belongs to the great painter!"

are you a painter, sir?" The other made answer, a little startled in his turn, "Why, didn't you know that? Did you never see my name at the bottom of prints?" He could not recollect that he had. "And yet you sell picture-frames and prints?" "Yes." "What painter's names then did he recollect: Did he know West's?" "Oh! yes." "And Opie's?" "Yes." "And Fuseli's?" "Oh! yes." "But you never heard of me?" I cannot say that I ever did!" It was plain, from this conversation, that Mr Northcote had not kept company enough with picture-dealers and newspaper critics. On another occasion, a country-gentleman, who was sitting to him for his portrait, asked him if he had any pictures in the Exhibition at Somerset-house, and on his replying in the affirmative, desired to know what they were. He mentioned among others, "The Marriage of Two Children;" on which the gentleman expressed great surprise, and said that was the very picture his wife was always teasing him to go and have another look at, though he had never noticed the painter's name. When the public are so eager to be amused, and care so little who it is that amuses them, it is not amiss to remind them of it now and then; or even to have a starling taught to repeat the name, to which they owe such misprized obligations, in their drowsy ears. On any other principle, I cannot

conceive how painters (not without genius or industry) can fling themselves at the head of the public in the manner they do, having lives written of themselves, busts made of themselves, prints stuck in the shop-windows of themselves, and their names placed in "the first row of the rubric," with those of Rubens, Raphael, and Michael Angelo, swearing by themselves or their proxies that these glorified spirits would do well to leave the abodes of the blest in order to stand in mute wonder and with uplifted hands before some production of theirs, which is yet hardly dry! Oh! whatever you do, leave the string untouched. It will jar the rash and unhallowed hand that meddles with it. Profane not the mighty dead by mixing them up with the uncanonized living. Leave yourself a reversion in immortality, beyond the noisy clamour of the day. Do not quite lose your respect for public opinion by making it in all cases a palpable cheat, the echo of your own lungs that are hoarse with calling on the world to admire. Do not think to bully posterity, or to cozen your contemporaries. Be not always anticipating the effect of your picture on the town—think more about deserving success than commanding it. In issuing so many promissory notes upon the bank of fame, do not forget you have to pay in sterling gold. Believe that there is something in the pursuit of high art, beyond the

manufacture of a paragraph or the collection of receipts at the door of an exhibition. Venerate art as art. Study the works of others, and inquire into those of nature. Gaze at beauty. Become great by great efforts, and not by pompous pretensions. Do not think the world was blind to merit before your time, nor make the reputation of great genius the stalking horse to your vanity. You have done enough to insure yourself attention: you have now only to do something to deserve it, and to make good all that you have aspired to do!

There is a silent and systematic assumption of superiority which is as barefaced and unprincipled an imposture as the most impudent puffing. You may, by a tacit or avowed censure on all other arts, on all works of art, on all other pretensions, tastes, talents, but your own, produce a complete ostracism in the world of intellect, and leave yourself and your own performances alone standing, a mighty monument in a universal waste and wreck of genius. By cutting away the rude block and removing the rubbish from around it, the idol may be effectually exposed to view, placed on its pedestal of pride, without any other assistance. This method is more inexcusable than the other. For there is no egotism or vanity so hateful as that which strikes at our satisfaction in everything else, and derives its nourish-

ment from preying, like the vampyre, on the carcase of others' reputation. I would rather, in a word, that a man should talk for ever of himself with vapid senseless assurance, than preserve a malignant, heartless silence, when the merit of a rival is mentioned. I have seen instances of both, and can judge pretty well between them.

There is no great harm in putting forward one's own pretensions (of whatever kind), if this does not bear a sour, malignant aspect towards others. Every one sets himself off to the best advantage he can, and tries to steal a march upon public opinion. In this sense, too, "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Life itself is a piece of harmless quackery. A great house over your head is of no use but to announce the great man within. Dress, equipage, title, livery-servants, are only so many quack advertisements and assumptions of the question of merit. The star that glitters at the breast would be worth nothing but as a badge of personal distinction; and the crown itself is but a symbol of the virtues which the possessor inherits from a long line of illustrious ancestors! How much honour and honesty have been forfeited to be graced with a title or a ribbon; how much genius and worth have sunk to the grave, without an escutcheon and without an epitaph!

As men of rank and fortune keep lacqueys to reinforce their claims to self-respect, so men of genius sometimes surround themselves with a *coterie* of admirers to increase their reputation with the public. These *proneurs*, or satellites, repeat all their good things, laugh loud at all their jokes, and remember all their oracular decrees. They are their shadows and echoes. They talk of them in all companies, and bring back word of all that has been said about them. They hawk the good qualities of their patrons, as shopmen and barkers tease you to buy goods. I have no notion of this vanity at second-hand; nor can I see how this servile testimony from inferiors ("some followers of mine own") can be a proof of merit. It may soothe the ear; but that it should impose on the understanding, I own surprises me: yet there are persons who cannot exist without a *cortege* of this kind about them, in which they smiling read the opinion of the world, in the midst of all sorts of rancorous abuse and hostility, as Otho called for his mirror in the Illyrian field. One good thing is, that this evil, in some degree, cures itself; and when a man has been nearly ruined by a herd of these sycophants, he finds them leaving him, like thriftless dependents, for some more eligible situation, carrying away with them all the tattle they can pick up, and some left-off suit of finery. The same proneness to

adulation which made them lick the dust before one idol, makes them bow as low to the rising Sun; they are as lavish of detraction as they were prurient with praise; and the *protégé* and admirer of the editor of the ——— figures in Blackwood's train. The man is a lacquey, and it is of little consequence whose livery he wears!

I would advise those who volunteer the office of puffing, to go the whole length of it. No half-measures will do. Lay it on thick and three-fold, or not at all. If you are once harnessed into that vehicle, it will be in vain for you to think of stopping. You must drive to the devil at once. The mighty Tamburlane, to whose car you are yoked, cries out,

> "Holloa, you pamper'd jades of Asia,
> Can you not drive but twenty miles a day?"

He has you on the hip, for you have pledged your taste and judgment to his genius. Never fear but he will drive this wedge. If you are once screwed into such a machine, you must extricate yourself by main force. No hyperboles are too much: any drawback, any admiration on this side idolatry, is high treason. It is an unpardonable offence to say that the last production of your patron is not so good as the one before it; or that a performer shines more in one character than another. I remember once

hearing a player declare that he never looked into any newspapers or magazines, on account of the abuse that was always levelled at himself in them, though there were not less than three persons in company, who made it their business through these conduit pipes of fame to "cry him up to the top of the compass." This sort of expectation is a little *exigeante!*

One fashionable mode of acquiring reputation is by patronising it. This may be from various motives, real good nature, good taste, vanity, or pride. I shall only speak of the spurious ones in this place. The quack and the *would-be* patron are well met. The house of the latter is a sort of curiosity-shop or menagerie, where all sort of intellectual pretenders and grotesques, musical children, arithmetical prodigies, occult philosophers, lecturers, accouchers, apes, chemists, fiddlers, and buffoons, are to be seen for the asking, and are shown to the company for nothing. The folding doors are thrown open, and display a collection that the world cannot parallel again. There may be a few persons of common sense and established reputation, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*, otherwise it is a mere scramble or lottery. The professed encourager of *virtù* and letters, being disappointed of the great names, sends out into the highways for the halt, the lame, and the blind, for all who pretend to distinction, defects, and obliquities, for all the

disposable vanity or affectation floating on the town, in hopes that, among so many oddities, chance may bring some jewel or treasure to his door, which he may have the good fortune to appropriate in some way to his own use, or the credit of displaying to others. The art is to encourage rising genius—to bring forward doubtful and unnoticed merit. You thus get a set of novices and raw pretenders about you, whose actual productions do not interfere with your self-love, and whose future efforts may reflect credit on your singular sagacity and faculty for finding out talent in the germ; and in the next place, by having them completely in your power, you are at liberty to dismiss them whenever you will, and to supply the deficiency by a new set of wondering, unwashed faces, in a rapid succession; an "aiery of children," embryo actors, artists, poets, or philosophers. Like unfledged birds, they are hatched, nursed, and fed by hand; this gives room for a vast deal of management, meddling, care, and condescending solicitude, but the instant the callow brood are fledged, they are driven from the nest and forced to shift for themselves in the wide world. One sterling production decides the question between them and their patrons, and from that time they become the property of the public. Thus a succession of importunate, hungry, idle, over-weening candidates for fame, are encou-

raged by these fickle keepers, only to be betrayed, and left to starve or beg, or pine in obscurity, while the man of merit and respectability is neglected, discountenanced, and stigmatised, because he will not lend himself as a tool to this system of splendid imposition, or pamper the luxury and weaknesses of the Vulgar Great. When a young artist is too independent to subscribe to the dogmas of his superiors, or fulfils their predictions and prognostics of wonderful contingent talent too soon, so as to get out of leading strings, and lean on public opinion for partial support, exceptions are taken to his dress, dialect, or manners, and he is expelled the circle with a character for ingratitude and treachery. None can procure toleration long but those who do not contradict the opinions, or excite the jealousy of their betters. One independent step is an appeal from them to the public, their natural and hated rivals, and annuls the contract between them, which implies ostentatious countenance on the one part, and servile submission on the other. But enough of this.

The patronage of men of talent, even when it proceeds from vanity, is often carried on with a spirit of generosity and magnificence, as long as these are in difficulties and a state of dependence; but as the principle of action in this case is a love of power, the complacency in the ob-

ject of friendly regard ceases with the opportunity or necessity for the same manifest display of power; and when the unfortunate *protegé* is just coming to land, and expects a last helping hand, he is, to his surprise, pushed back, in order that he may be saved from drowning once more. You are not hailed ashore, as you had supposed, by these kind friends, as a mutual triumph after all your struggles and their exertions in your behalf. It is a piece of presumption in you to be seen walking on *terra firma:* you are required, at the risk of their friendship, to be always swimming in troubled waters, that they may have the benefit of throwing out ropes, and sending out life-boats to you, without ever bringing you ashore. Your successes, your reputation, which you think would please them, as justifying their good opinion, are coldly received, and looked at askance, because they remove your dependence on them: if you are under a cloud, they do all they can to keep you there by their good will: they are so sensible of your gratitude that they wish your obligations never to cease, and take care you shall owe no one else a good turn; and provided you are compelled or contented to remain always in poverty, obscurity, and disgrace, they will continue your very good friends and humble servants to command, to the end of the chapter. The tenure of these indentures is

hard. Such persons will wilfully forfeit the gratitude created by years of friendship, by refusing to perform the last act of kindness that is likely ever to be demanded of them: will lend you money, if you have no chance of repaying them: will give you their good word, if nobody will believe it; and the only thing they do not forgive is an attempt or probability on your part, of being able to repay your obligations. There is something disinterested in all this: at least, it does not show a cowardly or mercenary disposition, but it savours too much of arrogance and arbitrary pretension. It throws a damning light on this question to consider who are mostly the subjects of the patronage of the great, and in the habit of receiving cards of invitation to splendid dinners. I confess, for one, I am not on the list; at which I do not grieve much, nor wonder at all. Authors, in general, are not in much request. Dr Johnson was asked why he was not more frequently invited out; and he said, "Because great lords and ladies do not like to have their mouths stopped." Garrick was not in this predicament: he could amuse the company in the drawing-room by imitating the great moralist and lexicographer, and make the negro boy, in the court-yard, die with laughter to see him take off the swelling airs and strut of the turkey-cock. This was clever and amusing, but it did not involve an opinion, it did not

lead to a difference of sentiment, in which the owner of the house might be found in the wrong. Players, singers, dancers, are hand and glove with the great. They embellish, and have an *eclat* in their names, but do not come into collision. Eminent portrait-painters, again, are tolerated, because they come into personal contact with the great: and sculptors hold equality with lords when they have a certain quantity of solid marble in their workshops to answer for the solidity of their pretensions. People of fashion and property must have something to show for their patronage, something visible or tangible. A sentiment is a visionary thing; an argument may lead to dangerous consequences, and those who are likely to broach either one or the other, are not, therefore, fit for good company in general. Poets, and men of genius, who find their way there, soon find their way out. They are not of that ilk, with some exceptions. Painters who come in contact with majesty get on by servility and buffoonery, by letting themselves down in some way. Sir Joshua was never a favourite at court. He kept too much at a distance. Beechey gained a vast deal of favour by familiarity, and lost it by taking too great freedoms.* West ingra-

* Sharp became a great favourite with the king on the following occasion. It was the custom, when the king

tiated himself in the same quarter by means of practices as little creditable to himself as his august employer, namely, by playing the hypocrite, and professing sentiments the reverse of those he naturally felt. Kings (I know not how justly) have been said to be lovers of low company and low conversation. They are also said to be fond of dirty practical jokes. If the fact is so, the reason is as follows. From the elevation of their rank, aided by pride and flattery, they look down on the rest of mankind, and would not be thought to have all their advantages for nothing. They wish to maintain the same precedence in private life that belongs to them as a matter of outward ceremony. This pretension they cannot keep up by fair means; for in wit or argument they are not superior to the common run of men. They, therefore, answer a repartee by a practical joke, which turns the laugh against others, and cannot be

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went through the lobbies of the palace, for those who preceded him to cry out, "Sharp, sharp; look sharp," in order to clear the way. Mr Sharp, who was waiting in a room just by (preparing some colours), hearing his name repeated so urgently, ran out in great haste, and came up with all his force against the king, who was passing the door at the time. The young artist was knocked down in the encounter, and the attendants were in the greatest consternation; but the king laughed heartily at the adventure, and took great notice of the unfortunate subject of it from that time forward.

retaliated with safety. That is, they avail themselves of the privilege of their situation to take liberties, and degrade those about them, as they can only keep up the idea of their own dignity by proportionably lowering their company

ESSAY XII.

ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTER.

It is astonishing, with all our opportunities and practice, how little we know of this subject. For myself, I feel that the more I learn, the less I understand it.

I remember, several years ago, a conversation in the diligence coming from Paris, in which, on its being mentioned that a man had married his wife after thirteen years' courtship, a fellow-countryman of mine observed, that "then, at least, he would be acquainted with her character;" when a Monsieur P——, inventor and proprietor of the 'Invisible Girl,' made answer, "No, not at all; for that the very next day she might turn out the very reverse of the character that she had appeared in during all the preceding time."* I could not help admiring the

* "It is not a year or two shows us a man."—Æmilia. in Othello.

superior sagacity of the French juggler, and it struck me then that we could never be sure when we had got at the bottom of this riddle.

There are various ways of getting at a knowledge of character—by looks, words, actions. The first of these, which seems the most superficial, is perhaps the safest, and least liable to deceive: nay, it is that which mankind, in spite of their pretending to the contrary, most generally go by. Professions pass for nothing, and actions may be counterfeited: but a man cannot help his looks. "Speech," said a celebrated wit, "was given to man to conceal his thoughts." Yet I do not know that the greatest hypocrites are the least silent. The mouth of Cromwell is pursed up in the portraits of him, as if he was afraid to trust himself with words. Lord Chesterfield advises us, if we wish to know the real sentiments of the person we are conversing with, to look in his face, for he can more easily command his words than his features. A man's whole life may be a lie to himself and others; and yet a picture painted of him by a great artist would probably stamp his true character on the canvas, and betray the secret to posterity. Men's opinions were divided, in their life-times, about such prominent personages as Charles V and Ignatius Loyola; partly, no doubt, from passion and interest, but partly from contradictory evidence in their ostensible conduct: the spectator, who has ever seen their pictures by

Titian, judges of them at once, and truly. I had rather leave a good portrait of myself behind me than have a fine epitaph. The face, for the most part, tells what we have thought and felt—the rest is nothing. I have a higher idea of Donne from a rude, half-effaced outline of him prefixed to his poems than from anything he ever wrote. Cæsar's 'Commentaries' would not have redeemed him in my opinion, if the bust of him had resembled the Duke of Wellington. My old friend Fawcett used to say, that if Sir Isaac Newton himself had lisped, he could not have thought anything of him. So I cannot persuade myself that any one is a great man, who looks like a fool. In this I may be wrong.

First impressions are often the truest, as we find (not unfrequently) to our cost, when we have been wheedled out of them by plausible professions or actions. A man's look is the work of years, it is stamped on his countenance by the events of his whole life, nay, more, by the hand of nature, and it is not to be got rid of easily. There is, as it has been remarked repeatedly, something in a person's appearance at first sight which we do not like, and that gives us an odd twinge, but which is overlooked in a multiplicity of other circumstances, till the mask is taken off, and we see this lurking character verified in the plainest manner in the sequel. We are struck at first, and by chance,

with what is peculiar and characteristic; also with permanent traits and general effect: this afterwards goes off in a set of unmeaning, common-place details. This sort of *prima-facie* evidence then shows what a man is, better than what he says or does; for it shows us the habit of his mind, which is the same under all circumstances and disguises. You will say, on the other hand, that there is no judging by appearances as a general rule. No one, for instance, would take such a person for a very clever man without knowing who he was. Then, ten to one, he is not: he may have got the reputation, but it is a mistake. You say, there is Mr ——, undoubtedly a person of great genius; yet, except when excited by something extraordinary, he seems half dead. He has wit at will, yet wants life and spirit. He is capable of the most generous acts, yet meanness seems to cling to every motion. He looks like a poor creature—and in truth he is one! The first impression he gives you of him answers nearly to the feeling he has of his personal identity; and this image of himself, rising from his thoughts, and shrouding his faculties, is that which sits with him in the house, walks out with him into the street, and haunts his bed-side. The best part of his existence is dull, cloudy, leaden: the flashes of light that proceed from it, or streak it here and there, may dazzle others, but do not

deceive himself. Modesty is the lowest of the virtues, and is a real confession of the deficiency it indicates. He who undervalues himself is justly undervalued by others. Whatever good properties he may possess are, in fact, neutralised by a "cold rheum" running through his veins, and taking away the zest of his pretensions, the pith and marrow of his performances. What is it to me that I can write these TABLE-TALKS? It is true I can, by a reluctant effort, rake up a parcel of half-forgotten observations, but they do not float on the surface of my mind, nor stir it with any sense of pleasure, nor even of pride. Others have more property in them than I have: they may reap the benefit, I have only had the pain. Otherwise, they are to me as if they had never existed: nor should I know that I had ever thought at all, but that I am reminded of it by the strangeness of my appearance, and my unfitness for everything else. Look in Coleridge's face while he is talking. His words are such as might "create a soul under the ribs of death." His face is a blank. Which are we to consider as the true index of his mind? Pain, languor, shadowy remembrances, are the uneasy inmates there: his lips move mechanically!

There are people that we do not like, though we may have known them long, and have no fault to find with them, "their appearance, as

we say, is so much against them." That is not all, if we could find it out. There is generally a reason for this prejudice; for nature is true to itself. They may be very good sort of people, too, in their way, but still something is the matter. There is a coldness, a selfishness, a levity, an insincerity, which we cannot fix upon any particular phrase or action, but we see it in their whole persons and deportment. One reason that we do not see it in any other way may be, that they are all the time trying to conceal this defect by every means in their power. There is, luckily, a sort of second sight in morals: we discern the lurking indications of temper and habit a long while before their palpable effects appear. I once used to meet with a person at an ordinary, a very civil, good-looking man in other respects, but with an odd look about his eyes, which I could not explain, as if he saw you under their fringed lids, and you could not see him again: this man was a common sharper. The greatest hypocrite I ever knew was a little, demure, pretty, modest-looking girl, with eyes timidly cast upon the ground, and an air soft as enchantment; the only circumstance that could lead to a suspicion of her true character was a cold, sullen, watery, glazed look about the eyes, which she bent on vacancy, as if determined to avoid all explanation with yours. I might have spied in their glittering, motionless surface, the

rocks and quicksands that awaited me below! We do not feel quite at ease in the company or friendship of those who have any natural obliquity or imperfection of person. The reason is, they are not on the best terms with themselves, and are sometimes apt to play off on others the tricks that nature has played them. This, however, is a remark that, perhaps, ought not to have been made. I know a person to whom it has been objected as a disqualification for friendship, that he never shakes you cordially by the hand. I own this is a damper to sanguine and florid temperaments, who abound in these practical demonstrations and "compliments extern." The same person, who testifies the least pleasure at meeting you, is the last to quit his seat in your company, grapples with a subject in conversation right earnestly, and is, I take it, backward to give up a cause of a friend. Cold and distant in appearance, he piques himself on being the king of good haters, and a no less zealous partisan. The most phlegmatic constitutions often contain the most inflammable spirits—as fire is struck from the hardest flin ts.

And this is another reason that makes it difficult to judge of character. Extremes meet; and qualities display themselves by the most contradictory appearances. Any inclination, in consequence of being generally suppressed,

vents itself the more violently when an opportunity presents itself: the greatest grossness sometimes accompanies the greatest refinement, as a natural relief, one to the other; and we find the most reserved and indifferent tempers at the beginning of an entertainment, or an acquaintance, turn out the most communicative and cordial at the end of it. Some spirits exhaust themselves at first: others gain strength by progression. Some minds have a greater facility of throwing off impressions, are, as it were, more transparent or porous than others. Thus the French present a marked contrast to the English in this respect. A Frenchman addresses you at once with a sort of lively indifference: an Englishman is more on his guard, feels his way, and is either exceedingly reserved, or lets you into his whole confidence, which he cannot so well impart to an entire stranger. Again, a Frenchman is naturally humane: an Englishman is, I should say, only friendly by habit. His virtue and his vices cost him more than they do his more gay and volatile neighbours. An Englishman is said to speak his mind more plainly than others:—yes, if it will give you pain to hear it. He does not care whom he offends by his discourse: a foreigner generally strives to oblige in what he says. The French are accused of promising more than they perform. That may be, and yet they may perform as

many good-natured acts as the English, if the latter are as averse to perform as they are to promise. Even the professions of the French may be sincere at the time, or arise out of the impulse of the moment; though their desire to serve you may be neither very violent nor very lasting. I cannot think, notwithstanding, that the French are not a serious people; nay, that they are not a more reflecting people than the common run of the English. Let those who think them merely light and mercurial, explain that enigma, their everlasting prosing tragedy. The English are considered as comparatively a slow, plodding people. If the French are quicker, they are also more plodding. See, for example, how highly finished and elaborate their works of art are! How systematic and correct they aim at being in all their productions of a graver cast! "If the French have a fault," as Yorick said, "it is that they are too grave." With wit, sense, cheerfulness, patience, good-nature and refinement of manners, all they want is imagination and sturdiness of moral principle! Such are some of the contradictions in the character of the two nations, and so little does the character of either appear to have been understood! Nothing can be more ridiculous, indeed, than the way in which we exaggerate each other's vices and extenuate our own. The whole is an affair of prejudice on one side of the question,

and of partiality on the other. Travellers who set out to carry back a true report of the case appear to lose not only the use of their understandings, but of their senses, the instant they set foot in a foreign land. The commonest facts and appearances are distorted, and discoloured. They go abroad with certain preconceived notions on the subject, and they make everything answer, in reason's spite, to their favourite theory. In addition to the difficulty of explaining customs and manners foreign to our own, there are all the obstacles of wilful prepossession thrown in the way. It is not, therefore, much to be wondered at that nations have arrived at so little knowledge of one another's characters; and that, where the object has been to widen the breach between them, any slight differences that occur are easily blown into a blaze of fury by repeated misrepresentations, and all the exaggerations that malice or folly can invent!

This ignorance of character is not confined to foreign nations: we are ignorant of that of our own countrymen in a class a little below or above ourselves. We shall hardly pretend to pronounce magisterially on the good or bad qualities of strangers; and, at the same time, we are ignorant of those of our friends, of our kindred, and of our own. We are in all these,

cases either too near or too far off the object to judge of it properly.

Persons, for instance, in a higher or middle rank of life know little or nothing of the characters of those below them, as servants, country people, &c. I would lay it down in the first place as a general rule on this subject, that all uneducated people are hypocrites. Their sole business is to deceive. They conceive themselves in a state of hostility with others, and stratagems are fair in war. The inmates of the kitchen and the parlour are always (as far as respects their feelings and intentions towards each other) in Hobbes's "state of nature." Servants and others in that line of life have nothing to exercise their spare talents for invention upon but those about them. Their superfluous electrical particles of wit and fancy are not carried off by those established and fashionable conductors, novels and romances. Their faculties are not buried in books, but all alive and stirring, erect and bristling like a cat's back. Their coarse conversation sparkles with "wild wit, invention ever new." Their betters try all they can to set themselves up above them, and they try all they can to pull them down to their own level. They do this by getting up a little comic interlude, a daily, domestic, homely drama out of the odds and ends of the family failings

of which there is in general a pretty plentiful supply, or make up the deficiency of materials out of their own heads. They turn the qualities of their masters and mistresses inside out, and any real kindness or condescension only sets them the more against you. They are not to be taken in in that way—they will not be balked in the spite they have to you. They only set to work with redoubled alacrity, to lessen the favour or to blacken your character. They feel themselves like a degraded *caste*, and cannot understand how the obligations can be all on one side, and the advantages all on the other. You cannot come to equal terms with them—they reject all such overtures as insidious and hollow —nor can you ever calculate upon their gratitude or good-will, any more than if they were so many strolling Gipsies or wild Indians. They have no fellow-feeling, they keep no faith with the more privileged classes. They are in your power, and they endeavour to be even with you by trick and cunning, by lying and chicanery. In this they have nothing to restrain them. Their whole life is a succession of shifts, excuses, and expedients. The love of truth is a principle with those only who have made it their study, who have applied themselves to the pursuit of some art or science, where the intellect is severely tasked, and learns by habit to take a pride in, and to set a just value on, the cor-

rectness of its conclusions. To have a disinterested regard to truth, the mind must have contemplated it in abstract and remote questions; whereas the ignorant and vulgar are only conversant with those things in which their own interest is concerned. All their notions are local, personal, and consequently gross and selfish. They say whatever comes uppermost —turn whatever happens to their own account —and invent any story, or give any answer, that suits their purposes. Instead of being bigoted to general principles, they trump up any lie for the occasion, and the more of a thumper it is the better they like it; the more unlooked-for it is, why, so much the more of a God-send! They have no conscience about the matter: and if you find them out in any of their manœuvres, are not ashamed of themselves, but angry with you. If you remonstrate with them, they laugh in your face. The only hold you have of them is their interest—you can but dismiss them from your employment; and service is no inheritance. If they affect anything like decent remorse, and hope you will pass it over, all the while they are probably trying to recover the wind of you. Persons of liberal knowledge or sentiments have no kind of chance in this sort of mixed intercourse with these barbarians in civilised life. You cannot tell, by any signs or principles, what is passing in their minds.

There is no common point of view between you. You have not the same topics to refer to, the same language to express yourself. Your interests, your feelings, are quite distinct. You take certain things for granted as rules of action: they take nothing for granted but their own ends, pick up all their knowledge out of their own occasions, are on the watch only for what they can catch—are

> "Subtle as the fox for prey:
> Like warlike as the wolf, for what they eat."

They have indeed a regard to their character, as this last may affect their livelihood or advancement, none as it is connected with a sense of propriety; and this sets their mother-wit and native talents at work upon a double file of expedients, to bilk their consciences, and salve their reputation. In short, you never know where to have them, any more than if they were of a different species of animals; and in trusting to them, you are sure to be betrayed and overreached. You have other things to mind, they are thinking only of you, and how to turn you to advantage. Give and take is no maxim here. You can build nothing on your own moderation or on their false delicacy. After a familiar conversation with a waiter at a tavern, you overhear him calling you by some provoking nickname. If you make a present to the daughter

of the house where you lodge, the mother is sure to recollect some addition to her bill. It is a running fight. In fact, there is a principle in human nature not willingly to endure the idea of a superior, a sour jacobinical disposition to wipe out the score of obligation, or efface the tinsel of external advantages—and where others have the opportunity of coming in contact with us, they generally find the means to establish a sufficiently marked degree of degrading equality. No man is a hero to his valet-de-chambre, is an old maxim. A new illustration of this principle occurred the other day. While Mrs Siddons was giving her readings of Shakespear to a brilliant and admiring drawing-room, one of the servants in the hall below was saying, "What, I find the old lady is making as much noise as ever!" So little is there in common between the different classes of society, and so impossible is it ever to unite the diversities of custom and knowledge which separate them.

Women, according to Mrs Peachum. are "bitter bad judges" of the characters of men; and men are not much better of theirs, if we can form any guess from their choice in marriage. Love is proverbially blind. The whole is an affair of whim and fancy. Certain it is, that the greatest favourites with the other sex are not those who are most liked or respected among their own. I never knew but one clever

man who was what is called a *lady's man*; and he (unfortunately for the argument) happened to be a considerable coxcomb. It was by this irresistible quality, and not by the force of his genius that he vanquished. Women seem to doubt their own judgments in love, and to take the opinion which a man entertains of his own powers and accomplishments for granted. The wives of poets are (for the most part) mere pieces of furniture in the room. If you speak to them of their husbands' talents or reputation in the world, it is as if you made mention o some office that they held. It can hardly be otherwise, when the instant any subject is started or conversation arises, in which men are interested, or try one another's strength, the women leave the room, or attend to something else. The qualities, then, in which men are ambitious to excel, and which ensure the applause of the world, eloquence, genius, learning, integrity, are not those which gain the favour of the fair. I must not deny, however, that wit and courage have this effect. Neither is youth or beauty the sole passport to their affections.

> "The way of woman's will is hard to find,
> Harder to hit."

Yet there is some clue to this mystery, some determining cause; for we find that the same

men are universal favourites with women, as others are uniformly disliked by them. Is not the load-stone that attracts so powerfully, and in all circumstances, a strong and undisguised bias towards them, a marked attention, a conscious preference of them to every other passing object or topic? I am not sure but I incline to think so. The successful lover is the *cavalier servente* of all nations. The man of gallantry behaves as if he had made an assignation with every woman he addresses. An argument immediately draws off my attention from the prettiest woman in the room. I accordingly succeed better in argument, than in love! I do not think that what is called "*love at first sight*" is so great an absurdity as it is sometimes imagined to be. We generally make up our minds beforehand to the sort of person we should like, grave or gay, black, brown, or fair; with golden tresses or with raven locks;—and when we meet with a complete example of the qualities we admire, the bargain is soon struck. We have never seen anything to come up to our newly discovered goddess before, but she is what we have been all our lives looking for. The idol we fall down and worship is an image familiar to our minds. It has been present to our waking thoughts, it has haunted us in our dreams, like some fairy vision. Oh! thou,

who, the first time I ever beheld thee, didst draw my soul into the circle of thy heavenly looks, and wave enchantment round me, do not think thy conquest less complete because it was instantaneous; for in that gentle form (as if another Imogene had entered) I saw all that I had ever loved of female grace, modesty, and sweetness!

I shall not say much of friendship as giving an insight into character, because it is often founded on mutual infirmities and prejudices. Friendships are frequently taken up on some sudden sympathy, and we see only as much as we please of one another's characters afterwards. Intimate friends are not fair witnesses to character, any more than professed enemies. They cool, indeed, in time, part, and retain only a rankling grudge at past errors and oversights. Their testimony in the latter case is not quite free from suspicion.

One would think that near relations who live constantly together, and always have done so, must be pretty well acquainted with one another's characters. They are nearly in the dark about it. Familiarity confounds all traits of distinction: interest and prejudice take away the power of judging. We have no opinion on the subject, any more than of one another's faces. The penates, the household gods, are veiled. We do not see the features of those we

love, nor do we clearly distinguish their virtues or their vices. We take them as they are found in the lump:—by weight, and not by measure. We know all about the individuals, their sentiments, history, manners, words, actions, everything; but we know all these too much as facts, as inveterate, habitual impressions, as clothed with too many associations, as sanctified with too many affections, as woven too much into the web of our hearts, to be able to pick out the different threads, to cast up the items of the debtor and creditor account, or to refer them to any general standard of right and wrong. Our impressions with respect to them are too strong, too real, too much *sui generis*, to be capable of a comparison with anything but themselves. We hardly inquire whether those for whom we are thus interested, and to whom we are thus knit, are *better* or *worse* than others—the question is a kind of profanation—all we know is, they are *more* to us than any one else can be. Our sentiments of this kind are rooted and grow in us, and we cannot eradicate them by voluntary means. Besides, our judgments are bespoke, our interests take part with our blood. If any doubt arises, if the veil of our implicit confidence is drawn aside by any accident for a moment, the shock is too great, like that of a dislocated limb, and we recoil on our habitual impressions again. Let not that veil

ever be rent entirely asunder, so that those images may be left bare of reverential awe, and lose their religion: for nothing can ever support the desolation of the heart afterwards.

The greatest misfortune that can happen among relations is a different way of bringing up, so as to set one another's opinions and characters in an entirely new point of view. This often lets in an unwelcome daylight on the subject, and breeds schisms, coldness, and incurable heart-burnings in families. "I have sometimes thought whether the progress of society and march of knowledge does not do more harm in this respect, by loosening the ties of domestic attachment, and preventing those who are most interested in, and anxious to think well of one another, from feeling a cordial sympathy and approbation of each other's sentiments, manners, views, &c., than it does good by any real advantage to the community at large. The son, for instance, is brought up to the church, and nothing can exceed the pride and pleasure the father takes in him, while all goes on well in this favourite direction." His notions change, and he imbibes a taste for the Fine Arts. From this moment there is an end of anything like the same unreserved communication between them. The young man may talk with enthusiasm of his "Rembrandts, Correggios, and stuff:" it is all *Chinese* to the elder; and whatever satisfaction he may feel in hearing of his son's progress, or good

wishes for his success, he is never reconciled to the new pursuit, he still hankers after the first object that he had set his mind upon. Again, the grandfather is a Calvinist, who never gets the better of his disappointment at his son's going over to the Unitarian side of the question. The matter rests here, till the grandson, some years after, in the fashion of the day and "infinite agitation of men's wit," comes to doubt certain points in the creed in which he has been brought up, and the affair is all abroad again. Here are three generations made uncomfortable and in a manner set at variance, by a veering point of theology, and the officious meddling of biblical critics! Nothing, on the other hand, can be more wretched or common than that upstart pride and insolent good fortune which is ashamed of its origin; nor are there many things more awkward than the situation of rich and poor relations. Happy, much happier, are those tribes and people who are confined to the same *caste* and way of life from sire to son, where prejudices are transmitted like instincts, and where the same unvarying standard of opinion and refinement blends countless generations in its improgressive, everlasting mould!

Not only is there a wilful and habitual blindness in near kindred to each other's defects, but an incapacity to judge from the quantity of materials, from the contradictoriness of the evi-

dence. The chain of particulars is too long and massy for us to lift it or put it into the most approved ethical scales. The concrete result does not answer to any abstract theory, to any logical definition. There is black, and white, and gray, square and round—there are too many anomalies, too many redeeming points, in poor human nature, such as it actually is, for us to arrive at a smart, summary decision on it. We know too much to come to any hasty or partial conclusion. We do not pronounce upon the present act, because a hundred others rise up to contradict it. We suspend our judgments altogether, because in effect one thing unconsciously balances another; and perhaps this obstinate, pertinacious indecision would be the truest philosophy in other cases, where we dispose of the question of character easily, because we have only the smallest part of the evidence to decide upon. Real character is not one thing, but a thousand things; actual qualities do not conform to any factitious standard in the mind, but rest upon their own truth and nature. The dull stupor under which we labour in respect of those whom we have the greatest opportunities of inspecting nearly, we should do well to imitate, before we give extreme and uncharitable verdicts against those whom we only see in passing, or at a distance. If we knew them better, we should be disposed to say less about them.

In the truth of things, there are none utterly worthless, none without some drawback on their pretensions, or some alloy of imperfection. It has been observed that a familiarity with the worst characters lessens our abhorrence of them; and a wonder is often expressed that the greatest criminals look like other men. The reason is that *they are like other men in many respects.* If a particular individual was merely the wretch we read of, or conceive in the abstract, that is, if he was the mere personified idea of the criminal brought to the bar, he would not disappoint the spectator, but would look like what he would be —a monster! But he has other qualities, ideas, feelings, nay, probably virtues, mixed up with the most profligate habits or desperate acts. This need not lessen our abhorrence of the crime, though it does of the criminal; for it has the latter effect only by showing him to us in different points of view, in which he appears a common mortal, and not the caricature of vice we took him for, or spotted all over with infamy. I do not at the same time think this a lax or dangerous, though it is a charitable, view of the subject. In my opinion, no man ever answered in his own mind (except in the agonies of conscience or of repentance, in which latter case he throws the imputation from himself in another way) to the abstract idea of a *murderer.* He may have killed a man in self-defence, or "in the trade

of war," or to save himself from starving, or in revenge for an injury, but always "so as with a difference," or from mixed and questionable motives. The individual, in reckoning with himself, always takes into the account the considerations of time, place, and circumstance, and never makes out a case of unmitigated, unprovoked villany, of "pure defecated evil" against himself. There are degrees in real crimes: we reason and moralise only by names and in classes. I should be loth, indeed, to say, that "whatever is, is right;" but almost every actual choiceinclines to it, with some sort of imperfect, unconscious bias. This is the reason, besides the ends of secresy, of the invention of *slang* terms for different acts of profligacy committed by thieves, pickpockets, &c. The common names suggest associations of disgust in the minds of others, which those who live by them do not willingly recognise, and which they wish to sink in a technical phrascology. So there is a story of a fellow, who, as he was writing down his confession of a murder, stopped to ask how the word *murder* was spelt; this, if true, was partly because his imagination was staggered by the recollection of the thing, and partly because he shrunk from the verbal admission of it. "*Amen* stuck in his throat!" The defence made by Eugene Aram of himself against a charge of murder, some years before, shows that he in imagination

completely flung from himself the *nominal* crime imputed to him: he might, indeed, have staggered an old man with a blow, and buried his body in a cave, and lived ever since upon the money he found upon him, but there was "no malice in the case, none at all," as Peachum says. The very coolness, subtlety, and circumspection of his defence (as masterly a legal document as there is upon record) prove that he was guilty of the act, as much as they prove that he was unconscious of the *crime*.* In the same spirit, and I conceive with great metaphysical truth, Mr Coleridge, in his tragedy of *Remorse*, makes Ordonio (his chief character) wave the acknowledgment of his meditated guilt to his own mind, by putting into his mouth that striking soliloquy:

> Say, I had lay'd a body in the sun!
> Well! in a month there swarm forth from the corse
> A thousand, nay, ten thousand sentient beings
> In place of that one man. Say, I had *killed* him!
> Yet who shall tell me that each one and all
> Of these ten thousand lives is not as happy
> As that one life, which being push'd aside,
> Made room for these unnumber'd?—ACT II. SC. II.

* The bones of the murdered man were dug up in an old hermitage. On this, as one instance of the acuteness which he displayed all through the occasion, Aram remarks, "Where would you expect to find the bones of a man sooner than in a hermit's cell, except you were to look for them in a cemetery?" See NEWGATE CALENDAR for the year 1758 or 9.

I am not sure, indeed, that I have not got this whole train of speculation from him; but I should not think the worse of it on that account. That gentleman, I recollect, once asked me whether I thought that the different members of a family really liked one another so well, or had so much attachment as was generally supposed; and I said that I conceived the regard they had towards each other was expressed by the word *interest*, rather than by any other; which he said was the true answer. I do not know that I could mend it now. Natural affection is not pleasure in one another's company, nor admiration of one another's qualities; but it is an intimate and deep knowledge of the things that affect those to whom we are bound by the nearest ties with pleasure or pain; it is an anxious, uneasy, fellow-feeling with them, a jealous watchfulness over their good name, a tender and unconquerable yearning for their good. The love, in short, we bear them is the nearest to that we bear ourselves. *Home*, according to the old saying, *is home, be it never so homely*. We love ourselves, not according to our deserts, but our cravings after good: so we love our immediate relations in the next degree (if not, even sometimes a higher one) because we know best what they have suffered, and what sits nearest to their hearts. We are implicated,

in fact, in their welfare, by habit and sympathy, as we are in our own.

If our devotion to our own interests is much the same as to theirs, we are ignorant of our own characters for the same reason. We are parties too much concerned to return a fair verdict, and are too much in the secret of our own motives or situation not to be able to give a favourable turn to our actions. We exercise a liberal criticism upon ourselves, and put off the final decision to a late day. The field is large and open. Hamlet exclaims, with a noble magnanimity, "I count myself indifferent honest, and yet I could accuse me of such things!" If you could prove to a man that he is a knave, it would not make much difference in his opinion; his self-love is stronger than his love of virtue. Hypocrisy is generally used as a mask to deceive the world, not to impose on ourselves; for once detect the delinquent in his knavery, and he laughs in your face, or glories in his iniquity. This at least happens except where there is a contradiction in the character, and our vices are involuntary, and at variance with our convictions. One great difficulty is to distinguish ostensible motives, or such as we acknowledge to ourselves, from tacit or secret springs of action. A man changes his opinion readily, he thinks it candour: it is levity of mind. For the most part, we

are callous by custom to our defects and excellencies, unless where vanity steps in to exaggerate or extenuate them. I cannot conceive how it is that people are in love with their own persons, or astonished at their own performances, which are but a nine days' wonder to every one else. In general it may be laid down that we are liable to this twofold mistake in judging of our own talents: we, in the first place, nurse the rickety bantling, we think much of that which has cost us much pains and labour, and comes against the grain; and we also set little store by what we do with most ease to ourselves, and therefore best. The works of the greatest genius are produced almost unconsciously, with an ignorance on the part of the persons themselves that they have done anything extraordinary. Nature has done it for them. How little Shakespear seems to have thought of himself, or of his fame! Yet, if "to know another well, were to know one's self," he must have been acquainted with his own pretensions and character, "who knew all qualities with a learned spirit." His eye seems never to have been bent upon himself, but outwards upon nature. A man who thinks highly of himself, may almost set it down that it is without reason. Milton, notwithstanding, appears to have had a high opinion of himself, and to have made it good. He was conscious of his powers, and great by

design. Perhaps his tenaciousness, on the score of his own merit, might arise from an early habit of polemical writing, in which his pretensions were continually called to the bar of prejudice and party-spirit, and he had to plead not guilty to the indictment. Some men have died unconscious of immortality, as others have amost exhausted the sense of it in their life-times. Correggio might be mentioned as an instance of the one, Voltaire of the other.

There is nothing that helps a man in his conduct through life more than a knowledge of his own characteristic weaknesses (which, guarded against, become his strength), as there is nothing that tends more to the success of a man's talents than his knowing the limits of his faculties, which are thus concentrated on some practicable object. One man can do but one thing. Universal pretensions end in nothing. Or, as Butler has it, too much wit requires

"As much again to govern it."

There are those who have gone, for want of this self-knowledge, strangely out of their way, and others who have never found it. We find many who succeed in certain departments, and are yet melancholy and dissatisfied because they failed in the one to which they first devoted themselves, like discarded lovers, who pine after their scornful mistress. I will conclude with

observing, that authors in general overrate the extent and value of posthumous fame; for what (as it has been asked) is the amount even of Shakespear's fame? That in that very country which boasts his genius and his birth, perhaps, scarce one person in ten has ever heard of his name, or read a syllable of his writings!

ESSAY XIII.

ON THE PICTURESQUE AND IDEAL.

A FRAGMENT.

THE natural in visible objects is whatever is ordinarily presented to the senses: the picturesque is that which stands out, and catches the attention by some striking peculiarity: the *ideal* is that which answers to the preconceived imagination and appetite in the mind for love and beauty. The picturesque depends chiefly on the principle of discrimination or contrast; the *ideal* on harmony and continuity of effect: the one surprises, the other satisfies the mind; the one starts off from a given point, the other reposes on itself; the one is determined by an excess of form, the other by a concentration of feeling.

The picturesque may be considered as something like an excrescence on the face of nature. It runs imperceptibly into the fantastical and grotesque. Fairies and satyrs are picturesque,

but they are scarcely *ideal.* They are an extreme and unique conception of a certain thing, but not of what the mind delights in, or broods fondly over. The image created by the artist's hand is not moulded and fashioned by the love of good and yearning after grace and beauty, but rather the contrary: that is, they are ideal deformity, not ideal beauty. Rubens was perhaps the most picturesque of painters; but he was almost the least *ideal.* So Rembrandt was (out of sight) the most picturesque of colourists; as Correggio was the most *ideal.* In other words, his composition of light and shade is more a whole, more in unison, more blended into the same harmonious feeling than Rembrandt's, who staggers by contrast, but does not soothe by gradation. Correggio's forms, indeed, had a picturesque air; for they often incline (even when most beautiful) to the quaintness of caricature. Vandyke, I think, was at once the least picturesque and least *ideal* of all the great painters. He was purely natural, and neither selected from outward forms nor added anything from his own mind. He owes everything to perfect truth, clearness, and transparency; and though his productions certainly arrest the eye, and strike in a room full of pictures, it is from the contrast they present to other pictures, and from being stripped quite naked of all artificial advantages. They strike almost as a

piece of white paper would, hung up in the same situation. I began with saying that whatever stands out from a given line, and as it were projects upon the eye, is picturesque; and this holds true (comparatively) in form and colour. A rough terrier-dog, with the hair bristled and matted together, is picturesque. As we say, there is a decided character in it, a marked determination to an extreme point. A shock-dog is odd and disagreeable, but there is nothing picturesque in its appearance: it is a mere mass of flimsy confusion. A goat with projecting horns and pendent beard is a picturesque animal: a sheep is not. A horse is only picturesque from opposition of colour; as in Mr Northcote's study of Gadshill, where the white horse's head coming against the dark scowling face of the man makes as fine a contrast as can be imagined. An old stump of a tree with rugged bark, and one or two straggling branches, a little stunted hedge-row line, marking the boundary of the horizon, a stubble-field, a winding path, a rock seen against the sky, are picturesque, because they have all of them prominence and a distinctive character of their own. They are not objects (to borrow Shakespear's phrase) "of no mark or likelihood." A country may be beautiful, romantic, or sublime, without being picturesque. The Lakes in the North of England are not picturesque, though certainly the

most interesting sight in this country. To be a subject for painting, a prospect must present sharp striking points of view or singular forms, or one object must relieve and set off another. There must be distinct stages and salient points for the eye to rest upon or start from, in its progress over the expanse before it. That distance of a landscape will oftentimes look flat or heavy, which the trunk of a tree or a ruin in the foreground would immediately throw into perspective and turn to air. Rembrandt's landscapes are the least picturesque in the world, except from the straight lines and sharp angles, the deep incision and dragging of his pencil, like a harrow over the ground, and the broad contrast of earth and sky. Earth, in his copies, is rough and hairy; and Pan has struck his hoof against it! A camel is a picturesque ornament in a landscape or history-piece. This is not merely from its romantic and oriental character; for an elephant has not the same effect, and, if introduced as a necessary appendage, is also an unwieldy incumbrance. A negro's head in a group is picturesque from contrast: so are the spots on a panther's hide. This was the principle that Paul Veronese went upon, who said the rule for composition was *black upon white, and white upon black.* He was a pretty good judge. His celebrated picture of the Marriage of Cana is in all likelihood the completest piece of work-

manship extant in the art. When I saw it, it nearly covered one side of a large room in the Louvre (being itself forty feet by twenty); and it seemed as if that side of the apartment was thrown open, and you looked out at the open sky, at buildings, marble pillars, galleries with people in them, emperors, female slaves, Turks, negroes, musicians, all the famous painters of the time, the tables loaded with viands, goblets, and dogs under them—a sparkling, overwhelming confusion, a bright, unexpected reality—the only fault you could find was that no miracle was going on in the faces of the spectators: the only miracle there was the picture itself! A French gentleman, who showed me this "triumph of painting" (as it has been called), perceiving I was struck with it, observed, "My wife admires it exceedingly for the facility of the execution." I took this proof of sympathy for a compliment. It is said that when Humboldt, the celebrated traveller and naturalist, was introduced to Buonaparte, the Emperor addressed him in these words—"*Vous aimez la botanique, Monsieur*"—and, on the other's replying in the affirmative, added—"*Et ma femme aussi!*" This has been found fault with as a piece of brutality and insolence in the great man by bigoted critics, who do not know what a thing it is to get a Frenchwoman to agree with them in any point. For my part, I took the

observation as it was meant, and it did not put me out of conceit with myself or the picture that Madame M—— liked it as well as *Monsieur l'Anglais*. Certainly, there could be no harm in that. By the side of it happened to be hung two allegorical pictures of Rubens (and in such matters he too was "no baby*")—I do not remember what the figures were, but the texture seemed of wool or cotton. The texture of the Paul Veronese was not wool nor cotton, but stuff jewels, flesh, marble, air, whatever composed the essence of the varied subjects, in endless relief and truth of handling. If the Fleming had seen his two allegories hanging where they did, he would, without a question, have wished them far enough.

I imagine that Rubens's landscapes are picturesque: Claude's are *ideal*. Rubens is always in extremes: Claude in the middle. Rubens carries some one peculiar quality or feature of nature to the utmost verge of probability: Claude balances and harmonises different forms and masses with laboured delicacy, so that nothing falls short, no one thing overpowers another. Rainbows, showers, partial gleams of sunshine, moon-light are the means with which Rubens produces his most gorgeous and enchanting

* "And surely Mandricardo was no baby."
HARRINGTON'S ARIOSTO.

effects: there are neither rainbows nor showers, nor sudden bursts of sunshine, nor glittering moon-beams in Claude. He is all softness and proportion: the other is all spirit and brilliant excess. The two sides (for example) of one of Claude's landscapes balance one another, as in a scale of beauty: in Rubens the several objects are grouped and thrown together with capricious wantonness. Claude has more repose: Rubens more gayety and extravagance. And here it might be asked, Is a rainbow a picturesque or an *ideal* object? It seems to me to be both. It is an accident in nature; but it is an inmate of the fancy. It startles and surprises the sense, but it soothes and tranquillises the spirit. It makes the eye glisten to behold it, but the mind turns to it long after it has faded from its place in the sky. It has both properties, then, of giving an extraordinary impulse to the mind by the singularity of its appearance, and of riveting the imagination by its intense beauty. I may just notice here in passing, that I think the effect of moon-light is treated in an *ideal* manner in the well-known line in Shakespear —

"See how the moon-light *sleeps* upon yon bank!"

The image is heightened by the exquisiteness of the expression beyond its natural beauty, and it seems as if there could be no end to the de-

light taken in it. A number of sheep coming to a pool of water to drink, with shady trees in the back-ground, the rest of the flock following them, and the shepherd and his dog left carelessly behind, is surely the *ideal* in landscape-composition, if the *ideal* has its source in the interest excited by a subject, in its power of drawing the affections after it linked in a golden chain, and in the desire of the mind to dwell on it for ever. The *ideal*, in a word, is the height of the pleasing, that which satisfies and accords with the inmost longing of the soul: the picturesque is merely a sharper and bolder impression of reality. A morning mist drawing a slender veil over all objects is at once picturesque and *ideal:* for it, in the first place, excites immediate surprise and admiration, and, in the next, a wish for it to continue, and a fear lest it should be too soon dissipated. Is the Cupid riding on a lion in the ceiling at Whitehall, and urging him with a spear over a precipice, with only clouds and sky beyond, most picturesque or *ideal?* It has every effect of startling contrast and situation, and yet inspires breathless expectation and wonder for the event. Rembrandt's Jacob's Dream, again, is both—fearful to the eye, but realising that loftiest vision of the soul. Take two faces in Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper, the Judas and the St John: the one is all strength and repulsive character; the other is all divine grace and mild

sensibility. The individual, the characteristic in painting, is that *which is* in a marked manner —the *ideal* is that which we wish anything to be, and to contemplate without measure and without end. The first is truth, the last is good. The one appeals to the sense and understanding, the other to the will and the affections. The truly beautiful and grand attracts the mind to it by instinctive harmony, is absorbed in it, and nothing can ever part them afterwards. Look at a Madonna of Raffael's : what gives the *ideal* character to the expression,—the insatiable purpose of the soul, or its measureless content in the object of its contemplation? A portrait of Vandyke's is mere indifference and still-life in the comparison: it has not in it the principle of growing and still unsatisfied desire. In the *ideal* there is no fixed stint or limit but the limit of possibility: it is the infinite with respect to human capacities and wishes. Love is for this reason an *ideal* passion. We give to it our all of hope, of fear, of present enjoyment, and stake our last chance of happiness wilfully and desperately upon it. A good authority puts into the mouth of one of his heroines—

> "My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
> My love as deep !"—

How many fair catechumens will there be found in all ages to repeat as much after Shakespear's Juliet!

ESSAY XIV.

ON THE FEAR OF DEATH.

"And our little life is rounded with a sleep."

PERHAPS the best cure for the fear of death is to reflect that life has a beginning as well as an end. There was a time when we were not: this gives us no concern—why, then, should it trouble us that a time will come when we shall cease to be? I have no wish to have been alive a hundred years ago, or in the reign of Queen Anne: why should I regret and lay it so much to heart that I shall not be alive a hundred years hence, in the reign of I cannot tell whom?

When Bickerstaff wrote his Essays, I knew nothing of the subjects of them: nay, much later, and but the other day, as it were, in the beginning of the reign of George III. when Goldsmith, Johnson, Burke, used to meet at

the Globe, when Garrick was in his glory, and Reynolds was over head and ears with his portraits, and Sterne brought out the volumes of Tristram Shandy year by year, it was without consulting me: I had not the slightest intimation of what was going on: the debates in the House of Commons on the American war, or the firing at Bunker's hill, disturbed not me: yet I thought this no evil—I neither ate, drank, nor was merry, yet I did not complain: I had not then looked out into this breathing world, yet I was well; and the world did quite as well without me as I did without it! Why, then, should I make all this outcry about parting with it, and being no worse off than I was before? There is in the recollection, that at a certain time we were not come into the world, nothing that "the gorge rises at"—why should we revolt at the idea that we must one day go out of it? To die is only to be as we were before we were born; yet no one feels any remorse, or regret, or repugnance, in contemplating this last idea. It is rather a relief and disburthening of the mind: it seems to have been holiday-time with us then: we were not called to appear upon the stage of life, to wear robes and tatters, to laugh or cry, be hooted or applauded; we had lain *perdus* all this while, snug, out of harm's way; and had slept out our thousands of centuries without wanting to be waked up; at peace and

free from care, in a long nonage, in a sleep deeper and calmer than that of infancy, wrapped in the softest and finest dust. And the worst that we dread is, after a short, fretful, feverish being, after vain hopes, and idle fears, to sink to final repose again, and forget the troubled dream of life! . . . . . Ye armed men, knights templars, that sleep in the stone aisles of that old Temple church, where all is silent above, and where a deeper silence reigns below (not broken by the pealing organ), are ye not contented where ye lie? Or would you come out of your long homes to go to the Holy War? Or do ye complain that pain no longer visits you, that sickness has done its worst, that you have paid the last debt to nature, that you hear no more of the thickening phalanx of the foe, or your lady's waning love; and that, while this ball of earth rolls its eternal round, no sound shall ever pierce through to disturb your lasting repose, fixed as the marble over your tombs, breathless as the grave that holds you? And thou, oh! thou, to whom my heart turns, and will turn while it has feeling left, who didst love in vain, and whose first was thy last sigh, wilt not thou too rest in peace (or wilt thou cry to me complaining from thy clay-cold bed) when that sad heart is no longer sad, and that sorrow is dead which thou wert only called into the world to feel!

It is certain that there is nothing in the idea of a pre-existent state that excites our longing like the prospect of a posthumous existence. We are satisfied to have begun life when we did; we have no ambition to have set out on our journey sooner; and we feel that we have had quite enough to do to battle our way through since. We cannot say,

> "The wars we well remember of King Nine,
> Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine."

Neither have we any wish: we are contented to read of them in story, and to stand and gaze at the vast sea of time that separates us from them. It was early days then: the world was not *well-aired* enough for us: we have no inclination to have been up and stirring. We do not consider the six thousand years of the world before we were born as so much time lost to us: we are perfectly indifferent about the matter. We do not grieve and lament that we did not happen to be in time to see the grand mask and pageant of human life going on in all that period; though we are mortified at being obliged to quit our stand before the rest of the procession passes.

It may be suggested in explanation of this difference, that we know from various records and traditions what happened in the time of Queen Anne, or even in the reigns of the Assyrian monarchs: but that we have no means of

ascertaining what is to happen hereafter but by awaiting the event, and that our eagerness and curiosity are sharpened in proportion as we are in the dark about it. This is not at all the case; for at that rate we should be constantly wishing to make a voyage of discovery to Greenland or to the Moon, neither of which we have, in general, the least desire to do. Neither, in truth, have we any particular solicitude to pry into the secrets of futurity, but as a pretext for prolonging our own existence. It is not so much that we care to be alive a hundred or a thousand years hence, any more than to have been alive a hundred or a thousand years ago: but the thing lies here, that we would all of us wish the present moment to last for ever. We would be as we are, and would have the world remain just as it is, to please us.

"The present eye catches the present object"—

to have and to hold while it may; and abhors, on any terms, to have it torn from us, and nothing left in its room. It is the pang of parting, the unloosing our grasp, the breaking asunder some strong tie, the leaving some cherished purpose unfulfilled, that creates the repugnance to go, and "makes calamity of so long life," as it often is.

——— "Oh! thou strong heart!
There's such a covenant 'twixt the world and thee,
They 're loth to break!"

The love of life, then, is an habitual attachment, not an abstract principle. Simply *to be* does not "content man's natural desire:" we long to be in a certain time, place, and circumstance We would much rather be now "on this bank and shoal of time," than have our choice of any future period, than take a slice of fifty or sixty years out of the Millennium, for instance. This shows that our attachment is not confined either to *being* or to *well-being*; but that we have an inveterate prejudice in favour of our immediate existence, such as it is. The mountaineer will not leave his rock, nor the savage his hut; neither are we willing to give up our present mode of life, with all its advantages and disadvantages, for any other that could be substituted for it. No man would, I think, exchange his existence with any other man, however fortunate. We had as lief *not be*, as *not be ourselves*. There are some persons of that reach of soul that they would like to live two hundred and fifty years hence, to see to what height of empire America will have grown up in that period, or whether the English constitution will last so long. These are points beyond me. But I confess I should like to live to see the downfal of the Bourbons. That is a vital question with me; and I shall like it the better, the sooner it happens!

No young man ever thinks he shall die. He may believe that others will, or assent to the

doctrine that "all men are mortal" as an abstract proposition, but he is far enough from bringing it home to himself individually.* Youth, buoyant activity, and animal spirits, hold absolute antipathy with old age as well as with death; nor have we, in the hey-day of life, any more than in the thoughtlessness of childhood, the remotest conception how

> "This sensible warm motion can become
> A kneaded clod"—

nor how sanguine, florid health and vigour, shall "turn to withered, weak, and grey." Or if in a moment of idle speculation we indulge in this notion of the close of life as a theory, it is amazing at what a distance it seems; what a long, leisurely interval there is between; what a contrast its slow and solemn approach affords to our present gay dreams of existence! We eye the farthest verge of the horizon, and think what a way we shall have to look back upon ere we arrive at our journey's end; and, without our in the least suspecting it, the mists are at our feet, and the shadows of age encompass us. The two divisions of our lives have melted into each other: the extreme points close and meet with none of that romantic interval stretching out

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* "All men think all men mortal but themselves."
YOUNG.

between them that we had reckoned upon; and for the rich, melancholy, solemn hues of age, "the sear, the yellow leaf," the deepening shadows of an autumnal evening, we only feel a dank, cold mist, encircling all objects, after the spirit of youth is fled. There is no inducement to look forward; and what is worse, little interest in looking back to what has become so trite and common. The pleasures of our existence have worn themselves out, are "gone into the wastes of time," or have turned their indifferent side to us: the pains by their repeated blows have worn us out, and have left us neither spirit nor inclination to encounter them again in retrospect. We do not want to rip up old grievances, nor to renew our youth like the phœnix, nor to live our lives twice over. Once is enough. As the tree falls, so let it lie. Shut up the book and close the account once for all!

It has been thought by some that life is like the exploring of a passage that grows narrower and darker the farther we advance, without a possibility of ever turning back, and where we are stifled for want of breath at last. For myself, I do not complain of the greater thickness of the atmosphere as I approach the narrow house. I felt it more, formerly,* when the idea

* I remember once, in particular, having this feeling in reading Schiller's Don Carlos, where there is a description of death, in a degree that almost stifled me.

alone seemed to suppress a thousand rising hopes, and weighed upon the pulses of the blood. At present I rather feel a thinness and want of support, I stretch out my hand to some object and find none, I am too much in a world of abstraction; the naked map of life is spread out before me, and in the emptiness and desolation I see Death coming to meet me. In my youth I could not behold him for the crowd of objects and feelings, and Hope stood always between us, saying—"Never mind that old fellow!" If I had lived indeed, I should not care to die. But I do not like a contract of pleasure broken off unfulfilled, a marriage with joy unconsummated, a promise of happiness rescinded. My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me. I would wish them to be re-edified. I should like to see some prospect of good to mankind, such as my life began with. I should like to leave some sterling work behind me. I should like to have some friendly hand to consign me to the grave. On these conditions I am ready, if not willing, to depart. I shall then write on my tomb—GRATEFUL AND CONTENTED! But I have thought and suffered too much to be willing to have thought and suffered in vain. In looking back, it sometimes appears to me as if I had, in a manner, slept out my life in a dream or shadow on the side of the hill of knowledge, where I have fed

on books, on thoughts, on pictures, and only heard in half-murmurs the trampling of busy feet, or the noises of the throng below. Waked out of this dim, twilight existence, and startled with the passing scene, I have felt a wish to descend to the world of realities, and join in the chase. But I fear too late, and that I had better return to my bookish chimeras and indolence once more! *Zanetto, lascia le donne, et studia la matematica.* I will think of it.

It is not wonderful that the contemplation and fear of death become more familiar to us as we approach nearer to it: that life seems to ebb with the decay of blood and youthful spirits; and that as we find everything about us subject to chance and change,—as our strength and beauty die,—as our hopes and passions, our friends and our affections, leave us, we begin by degrees to feel ourselves mortal!

I have never seen death but once, and that was in an infant. It is years ago. The look was calm and placid, and the face was fair and firm. It was as if a waxen image had been laid out in the coffin, and strewed with innocent flowers. It was not like death, but more like an image of life! No breath moved the lips, no pulse stirred, no sight or sound would enter those eyes or ears more. While I looked at it, I saw no pain was there; it seemed to smile at the short pang of life which was over: but I could

not bear the coffin-lid to be closed—it seemed to stifle me; and still as the nettles wave in a corner of the churchyard over his little grave, the welcome breeze helps to refresh me, and ease the tightness at my breast!

An ivory or marble image, like Chantry's monument of the two children, is contemplated with pure delight. Why do we not grieve and fret that the marble is not alive, or fancy that it has a shortness of breath? It never was alive; and it is the difficulty of making the transition from life to death, the struggle between the two in our imagination, that confounds their properties painfully together, and makes us conceive that the infant that is but just dead, still wants to breathe, to enjoy and look about it, and is prevented by the icy hand of death, locking up its faculties and benumbing its senses; so that, if it could, it would complain of its own hard state. Perhaps religious considerations reconcile the mind to this change sooner than any others, by representing the spirit as fled to another sphere, and leaving the body behind it. So in reflecting on death generally, we mix up the idea of life with it, and thus make it the ghastly monster it is. We think how we should feel; not how the dead feel:

> "Still from the tomb the voice of nature cries;
> Even in our ashes live their wonted fires!"

There is an admirable passage on this subject in TUCKER's *Light of Nature Pursued*, which I shall transcribe, as by much the best illustration I can offer of it.

"The melancholy appearance of a lifeless body,—the mansion provided for it to inhabit, dark, cold, close and solitary,—are shocking to the imagination; but it is to the imagination only, not the understanding; for whoever consults this faculty will see at first glance, that there is nothing dismal in all these circumstances: if the corpse were kept wrapped up in a warm bed, with a roasting fire in the chamber, it would feel no comfortable warmth therefrom: were stores of tapers lighted up as soon as day shuts in, it would see no objects to divert it: were it left at large, it would have no liberty, nor if surrounded with company would be cheered thereby; neither are the distorted features expressions of pain, uneasiness, or distress. This every one knows, and will readily allow upon being suggested, yet still cannot behold, nor even cast a thought upon those objects without shuddering; for, knowing that a living person must suffer grievously under such appearances, they become habitually formidable to the mind, and strike a mechanical horror, which is increased by the customs of the world around us."

There is usually one pang added voluntarily

and unnecessarily to the fear of death, by our affecting to compassionate the loss which others will have in us. If that were all, we might reasonably set our minds at rest. The pathetic exhortations on country tombstones, "Grieve not for me, my wife and children dear," &c. is for the most part speedily followed to the letter. We do not leave so great a void in society as we are inclined to imagine, partly to magnify our own importance, and partly to console ourselves by sympathy. Even in the same family the gap is not so great; the wound closes up sooner than we should expect. Nay, *our room* is not unfrequently thought better than *our company*. People walk along the streets the day after our deaths just as they did before, and the crowd is not diminished. While we were living, the world seemed in a manner to exist only for us, for our delight and amusement, because it contributed to them. But our hearts cease to beat, and it goes on as usual, and thinks no more about us than it did in our life-time. The million are devoid of sentiment, and care as little for you or me as if we belonged to the moon. We live the week over in the Sunday's paper, or are decently interred in some obituary at the month's end! It is not surprising that we are forgotten so soon after we quit this mortal stage: we are scarcely noticed, while we are on it. It is not merely that our names are not known in

China—they have hardly been heard of in the next street. We are hand and glove with the universe, and think the obligation is mutual. This is an evident fallacy. If this, however, does not trouble us now, it will not hereafter. A handful of dust can have no quarrel to pick with its neighbours, or complaint to make against Providence, and might well exclaim, if it had but an understanding and a tongue, "Go thy ways, old world, swing round in blue ether, voluble to every age, you and I shall no more jostle!"

It is amazing how soon the rich and titled, and even some of those who have wielded great political power, are forgotten.

> "A little rule, a little sway,
> Is all the great and mighty have
> Betwixt the cradle and the grave"—

and, after its short date, they hardly leave a name behind them. "A great man's memory may, at the common rate, survive him half a year." His heirs and successors take his titles, his power and his wealth—all that made him considerable or courted by others; and he has left nothing else behind him either to delight or benefit the world. Posterity are not by any means so disinterested as they are supposed to be. They give their gratitude and admiration only in return for benefits conferred. They

cherish the memory of those to whom they are indebted for instruction and delight; and they cherish it just in proportion to the instruction and delight they are conscious they receive. The sentiment of admiration springs immediately from this ground, and cannot be otherwise than well founded.*

The effeminate clinging to life as such, as a general or abstract idea, is the effect of a highly civilized and artificial state of society. Men formerly plunged into all the vicissitudes and dangers of war, or staked their all upon a single die, or some one passion, which, if they could not have gratified, life became a burthen to them —now our strongest passion is to think, our chief amusement is to read new plays, new poems, new novels, and this we may do at our leisure, in perfect security, *ad infinitum*. If we look into the old histories and romances, before

* It has been usual to raise a very unjust clamour against the enormous salaries of public singers, actors, and so on. This matter seems reducible to a *moral equation*. They are paid out of money raised by voluntary contributions in the strictest sense, and if they did not bring certain sums into the treasury, the Managers would not engage them. These sums are exactly in proportion to the number of individuals to whom their performance gives an extraordinary degree of pleasure. The talents of a singer, actor, &c., are therefore worth just as much as they will fetch.

the *belles-lettres* neutralised human affairs, and reduced passion to a state of mental equivocation, we find the heroes and heroines not setting their lives "at a pin's fee," but rather courting opportunities of throwing them away in very wantonness of spirit. They raise their fondness for some favourite pursuit to its height, to a pitch of madness, and think no price too dear to pay for its full gratification. Everything else is dross. They go to death as to a bridal bed, and sacrifice themselves or others without remorse at the shrine of love, of honour, of religion, or any other prevailing feeling. Romeo runs his "sea-sick, weary bark upon the rocks" of death, the instant he finds himself deprived of his Juliet; and she clasps his neck in their last agonies, and follows him to the same fatal shore. One strong idea takes possession of the mind and overrules every other; and even life itself, joyless without that, becomes an object of indifference or loathing. There is at least more of imagination in such a state of things, more vigour of feeling and promptitude to act, than in our lingering, languid, protracted attachment to life for its own poor sake. It is, perhaps, also better, as well as more heroical, to strike at some daring or darling object, and if we fail in that, to take the consequences manfully, than to renew the lease of a tedious, spiritless, charmless existence, merely (as Pierre

says) "to lose it afterwards in some vile brawl" for some worthless object. Was there not a spirit of martyrdom as well as a spice of the reckless energy of barbarism in this bold defiance of death? Had not religion something to do with it; the implicit belief in a future life, which rendered this of less value, and embodied something beyond it to the imagination; so that the rough soldier, the infatuated lover, the valorous knight, &c. could afford to throw away the present venture, and take a leap into the arms of futurity, which the modern sceptic shrinks back from, with all his boasted reason and vain philosophy, weaker than a woman! I cannot help thinking so myself; but I have endeavoured to explain this point before, and will not enlarge farther on it here.

A life of action and danger moderates the dread of death. It not only gives us fortitude to bear pain, but teaches us at every step the precarious tenure on which we hold our present being. Sedentary and studious men are the most apprehensive on this score. Dr Johnson was an instance in point. A few years seemed to him soon over, compared with those sweeping contemplations on time and infinity with which he had been used to pose himself. In the *still-life* of a man of letters, there was no obvious reason for a change. He might sit in an arm-chair and pour out cups of tea to all eternity. Would

it had been possible for him to do so! The most rational cure after all for the inordinate fear of death is to set a just value on life. If we merely wish to continue on the scene to indulge our headstrong humours and tormenting passions, we had better begone at once; and if we only cherish a fondness for existence according to the good we derive from it, the pang we feel at parting with it will not be very severe.

I will add a remark, which in some degree breaks the abruptness of the transition from life to death, and renders it less shocking to the imagination than it usually appears. Death is commonly represented as a monster that devours the whole man; the grave, as swallowing us entire; not only our future projects, but our past enjoyments as its prey, and all the pleasures of our lives collected together to make a rich banquet for the grim tyrant. But, in truth, Time has already anticipated the work of Death, and left him but half his spoils; for we die every moment of our lives. Death can only rob us of the future, the past he has no power over: our being gradually and silently slides from under us: our momentary pleasures follow each other as bubbles rise and disappear on the water, or the snow that melts as it falls: our attachments, and friendships and desires wear out and are forgotten: the objects of them are dead to us, and we outlive not only them but ourselves. We ourselves have drunk

up the cup of life, and have left only the lees. The stroke of death does not level the stately tree with all its blooming honours full upon it, but strikes the bare trunk and crumbling branches, and a few withered leaves. A shadow is all that generally remains of what we were, and we drag about a mockery of existence long after all the life of life is flown. It is the sense of self alone that makes death formidable, and that hinders us from perceiving that our fleeting existence is long ago lost in itself.

ESSAY XV.

THE OPERA.

THE Opera is a fine thing: the only question is, whether it is not too fine. It is the most fascinating, and at the same time the most tantalising, of all places. It is not the *too little*, but the *too much*, that offends us. Every object is there collected, and displayed in ostentatious profusion, that can strike the senses or dazzle the imagination; music, dancing, painting, poetry, architecture, the blaze of beauty, "the glass of fashion, and the mould of form;" and yet one is not satisfied—for the multitude and variety of objects distract the attention, and, by flattering us with a vain show of the highest gratification of every faculty and wish, leave us at last in a state of listlessness, disappointment, and *ennui*. The powers of the mind are exhausted, without being invigorated; our expectations are excited, not satisfied; and we are at some loss to distinguish an excess of irritation

from the height of enjoyment. To sit at the Opera for a whole evening is like undergoing the process of animal magnetism for the same length of time. It is an illusion and a mockery, where the mind is made "the fool of the senses," and cheated of itself; where pleasure after pleasure courts us, as in a fairy palace; where the Graces and the Muses, weaving in a gay, fantastic round with one another, still turn from our pursuit; where art, like an enchantress with a thousand faces, still allures our giddy admiration, shifts her mask, and again eludes us. The Opera, in short, proceeds upon a false estimate of taste and morals; it supposes that the capacity for enjoyment may be multiplied with the objects calculated to afford it. It is a species of intellectual prostitution; for we can no more receive pleasure from all our faculties at once than we can be in love with a number of mistresses at the same time. Though we have different senses, we have but one heart; and, if we attempt to force it into the service of them all at once, it must grow restive or torpid, hardened or enervated. The spectator may say to the sister-arts of Painting, Poetry, and Music, as they advance to him in a *pas-de-trois* at the Opera, "How happy could I be with either, were t'other dear charmers away;" but while "they all tease him together," the heart gives a satisfactory answer to none of them;—is ashamed

of its want of resources to supply the repeated calls upon its sensibility, seeks relief from the importunity of endless excitement in fastidious apathy or affected levity; and in the midst of luxury, pomp, vanity, indolence, and dissipation, feels only the hollow, aching void within, the irksome craving of unsatisfied desire, because more pleasures are placed within its reach than it is capable of enjoying, and the interference of one object with another ends in a double disappointment. Such is the best account I can give of the nature of the Opera,—of the contradiction between our expectations of pleasure and our uneasiness there,—of our very jealousy of the flattering appeals which are made to our senses, our passions, and our vanity, on all sides,—of the little relish we acquire for it, and the distaste it gives us for other things. Any one of the sources of amusement to be found there would be enough to occupy and keep the attention alive; the *tout ensemble* fatigues and oppresses it. One may be stifled to death with roses. A head-ache may be produced by a profusion of sweet smells or of sweet sounds; but we do not like the head-ache the more on that account. Nor are we reconciled to it, even at the Opera.

What makes the difference between an opera of Mozart's and the singing of a thrush confined in a wooden cage at the corner of the

street? The one is nature, and the other is art: the one is paid for, and the other is not. Madame Fodor sang the air of *Vedrai Carino* in 'Don Giovanni' so divinely, because she was hired to sing it; she sang it to please the audience, not herself, and did not always like to be *encored* in it; but the thrush that awakes us at daybreak with its song, does not sing because it is paid to sing, or to please others, or to be admired or criticised. It sings because it is happy: it pours the thrilling sounds from its throat, to relieve the overflowings of its own heart—the liquid notes come from, and go to the heart, dropping balm into it, as the gushing spring revives the traveller's parched and fainting lips. That stream of joy comes pure and fresh to the longing sense, free from art and affectation; the same that rises over vernal groves, mingled with the breath of morning, and the perfumes of the wild hyacinth; it waits for no audience, it wants no rehearsing, and still—

"Hymns its good God, and carols sweet of love."

This is the great difference between nature and art, that the one *is* what the other *seems* to be, and gives all the pleasure it expresses, because it feels it itself. Madame Fodor sang as a musical instrument may be made to play a tune, and perhaps with no more real delight; but it

is not so with the linnet or the thrush, that sings because God pleases, and pours out its little soul in pleasure. This is the reason why its singing is (so far) so much better than melody or harmony, than bass or treble, than the Italian or the German school, than quavers or crotchets, or half-notes, or canzonets, or quartetts, or anything in the world but truth and nature!

The Opera is the most artificial of all things. It is not only art, but ostentatious, unambiguous, exclusive art. It does not subsist as an imitation of nature, but in contempt of it; and, instead of seconding, its object is to pervert and sophisticate all our natural impressions of things. When the Opera first made its appearance in this country, there were strong prejudices entertained against it, and it was ridiculed as a species of the *mock-heroic*. The prejudices have worn out with time, and the ridicule has ceased; but the grounds for both remain the same in the nature of the thing itself. At the theatre, we see and hear what has been said, thought, and done by various people elsewhere; at the Opera, we see and hear what was never said, thought, or done any where but at the Opera. Not only is all communication with nature cut off, but every appeal to the imagination is sheathed and softened in the melting medium of Siren sounds. The ear is cloyed and glutted with warbled ecstasies or agonies;

while every avenue to terror or pity is carefully stopped up and guarded by song and recitative. Music is not made the vehicle of poetry, but poetry of music; the very meaning of the words is lost or refined away in the effeminacy of a foreign language. A grand serious Opera is a tragedy wrapped up in soothing airs, to suit the tender feelings of the nurslings of fortune—where tortured victims swoon on beds of roses, and the pangs of despair sink in tremulous accents into downy repose. Just so much of human misery is given as is proper to lull those who are exempted from it into a deeper sense of their own security: just enough of the picture of human life is shewn to relieve their languor without disturbing their indifference;—it is calculated not to excite their sympathy, but "with some sweet, oblivious antidote," to pamper their sleek and sordid apathy. In a word, the whole business of the Opera is to stifle emotion in its birth, and to intercept every feeling in its progress to the heart. Every impression that, left to itself, might sink deep into the mind, and wake it to real sympathy, is overtaken and baffled by means of some other impression, plays round the surface of the imagination, trembles into airy sound, or expires in an empty pageant. In the grand carnival of the senses the pulse of life is suspended, the link which binds us to humanity is broken; the soul is fretted by the

sense of excessive softness into a feverish hectic dream; truth becomes a fable; good and evil matters of perfect indifference, except as they can be made subservient to our selfish gratification; and there is hardly a vice for which the mind is not thus gradually prepared, no virtue of which it is not rendered incapable!

But what shall I say of the company at the Opera? Is it not grand, select, splendid, and imposing? Do we not see there "the flower of Britain's warriors, her statesmen, and her fair," her nobles and her diplomatic characters? First, one only knows the diplomatic characters by their taking prodigious quantities of snuff, and as to the great warriors, some that I know had better not show their faces—if there is any truth in physiognomy; and as to great men, I know of but one in modern times, and neither Europe nor the Opera-house was big enough to hold him. With respect to Lords and Ladies, we see them as we do gilded butterflies in glass cases. We soon get tired of them, for they seem tired of themselves and one another. They gape, stare, affect to whisper, laugh, or talk loud, to fill up the vacuities of thought and expression. They do not gratify our predilection for happy faces! But do we not feel the throb of pleasure from the blaze of beauty in the side-boxes? That blaze would be brighter, were it not quenched in the sparkling of diamonds. As

for the rest, *the grapes are sour*. Beauty is a thing that is not made only to be seen. Who can behold it without a transient wish to be near it, to adore, to possess it? He must be a fool or a coxcomb, whom the sight of a beauty dazzles, but does not warm; whom a thousand glances shot from a thousand heavenly faces pierce without wounding; who can behold without a pang the bowers of Paradise opening to him by a thousand doors, and barred against him by magic spells!—Bright creatures, fairest of the fair, ye shine above our heads, bright as Ariadne's crown, fair as the dewy star of evening: but ye are no more to us! There is no golden chain let down to us from you: we have sometimes seen you at a play, or caught a glimpse of your faces passing in a coronet-coach; but ——As I am growing romantic, I shall take a turn into the *crush-room*, where, following the train of the great statesmen, the warriors, and the diplomatic characters, I shall meet with a nearly equal display of external elegance and accomplishment, without the pride of sex, rank, or virtue! If the women were all Junos before, here they are all Venuses, and no less Goddesses! Those who complained of inaccessible beauty before may here find beauty more accessible, and take their revenge on the boxes in the lobbies!

ESSAY XVI.

ON THE CONDUCT OF LIFE; OR, ADVICE TO A SCHOOL-BOY.

My dear little Fellow,

You are now going to settle at school, and may consider this as your first entrance into the world. As my health is so indifferent, and I may not be with you long, I wish to leave you some advice (the best I can) for your conduct in life, both that it may be of use to you, and as something to remember me by. I may at least be able to caution you against my own errors, if nothing else.

As we went along to your new place of destination, you often repeated that "You durst say they were a set of stupid, disagreeable people," meaning the people at the school. You were to blame in this. It is a good old rule to hope for the best. Always, my dear, believe things to

be right till you find them the contrary; and even then, instead of irritating yourself against them, endeavour to put up with them as well as you can, if you cannot alter them. You said "You were sure you should not like the school where you were going." This was wrong. What you meant was that you did not like to leave home. But you could not tell whether you should like the school or not, till you had given it a trial. Otherwise, your saying that you should not like it was determining that you would not like it. Never anticipate evils; or, because you cannot have things exactly as you wish, make them out worse than they are, through mere spite and wilfulness.

You seemed at first to take no notice of your school-fellows, or rather to set yourself against them, because they were strangers to you. They knew as little of you as you did of them; so that this would have been a reason for their keeping aloof from you as well, which you would have felt as a hardship. Learn never to conceive a prejudice against others, because you know nothing of them. It is bad reasoning, and makes enemies of half the world. Do not think ill of them, till they behave ill to you; and then strive to avoid the faults which you see in them. This will disarm their hostility sooner than pique, or resentment, or complaint.

I thought you were disposed to criticise the

dress of some of the boys as not so good as your own. Never despise any one for anything that he cannot help—least of all, for his poverty. I would wish you to keep up appearances yourself as a defence against the idle sneers of the world, but I would not have you value yourself upon them. I hope you will neither be the dupe nor victim of vulgar prejudices. Instead of saying above—"Never despise any one for anything that he cannot help"—I might have said—"Never despise any one at all;" for contempt implies a triumph over and pleasure in the ill of another. It means that you are glad and congratulate yourself on their failings or misfortunes. The sense of inferiority in others, without this indirect appeal to our self-love, is a painful feeling, and not an exulting one.

You complain since, that the boys laugh at you and do not care about you, and that you are not treated as you were at home. My dear, that is one chief reason for your being sent to school, to inure you betimes to the unavoidable rubs and uncertain reception you may meet with in life. You cannot always be with me, and perhaps it is as well that you cannot. But you must not expect others to show the same concern about you as I should. You have hitherto been a spoiled child, and have been used to have your own way a good deal, both in the house and among your play-fellows, with whom you

were too fond of being a leader: but you have good nature and good sense, and will get the better of this in time. You have now got among other boys who are your equals, or bigger and stronger than yourself, and who have something else to attend to besides humouring your whims and fancies, and you feel this as a repulse or piece of injustice. But the first lesson to learn is that there are other people in the world besides yourself. There are a number of boys in the school where you are, whose amusements and pursuits (whatever they may be) are and ought to be of as much consequence to them as yours can be to you, and to which therefore you must give way in your turn. The more airs of childish self-importance you give yourself, you will only expose yourself to be the more thwarted and laughed at. True equality is the only true morality or true wisdom. Remember always that you are but one among others, and you can hardly mistake your place in society. In your father's house you might do as you pleased: in the world, you will find competitors at every turn. You are not born a king's son, to destroy or dictate to millions: you can only expect to share their fate, or settle your differences amicably with them. You already find it so at school; and I wish you to be reconciled to your situation as soon and with as little pain as you can.

It was my misfortune, perhaps, to be bred up among Dissenters, who look with too jaundiced an eye at others, and set too high a value on their own peculiar pretensions. From being proscribed themselves, they learn to proscribe others; and come in the end to reduce all integrity of principle and soundness of opinion within the pale of their own little communion. Those who were out of it, and did not belong to the class of *Rational Dissenters*, I was led erroneously to look upon as hardly deserving the name of rational beings. Being thus satisfied as to the select few who are "the salt of the earth" it is easy to persuade ourselves that we are at the head of them, and to fancy ourselves of more importance in the scale of true desert than all the rest of the world put together, who do not interpret a certain text of Scripture in the manner that we have been taught to do. You will (from the difference of education) be free from this bigotry, and will, I hope, avoid everything akin to the same exclusive and narrow-minded spirit. Think that the minds of men are various as their faces—that the modes and employments of life are numberless as they are necessary—that there is more than one class of merit—that though others may be wrong in some things, they are not so in all—and that countless races of men have been born, have lived and died, wthout ever hearing of

any one of those points in which you take a just pride and pleasure—and you will not err on the side of that spiritual pride or intellectual coxcombry which has been so often the bane of the studious and learned!

I observe you have got a way of speaking of your school-fellows as "*that* Hoare, *that* Harris," and so on, as if you meant to mark them out for particular reprobation, or did not think them good enough for you. It is a bad habit to speak disrespectfully of others: for it will lead you to think and feel uncharitably towards them. Ill names beget ill blood. Even where there may be some repeated trifling provocation, it is better to be courteous, mild, and forbearing, than captious, impatient, and fretful. The faults of others too often arise out of our own ill temper; or though they should be real, we shall not mend them by exasperating ourselves against them. Treat your playmates as Hamlet advises Polonius to treat the players, "according to your own dignity rather than their deserts." If you fly out at everything in them that you disapprove or think done on purpose to annoy you, you lie constantly at the mercy of their caprice, rudeness or ill-nature. You should be more your own master.

Do not begin to quarrel with the world too soon: for, bad as it may be, it is the best we

have to live in—here. If railing would have made it better, it would have been reformed long ago: but as this is not to be hoped for at present, the best way is to slide through it as contentedly and innocently as we may. The worst fault it has is want of charity: and calling *knave* and *fool* at every turn will not cure this failing. Consider (as a matter of vanity) that if there were not so many knaves and fools as we find, the wise and honest would not be those rare and shining characters that they are allowed to be; and (as a matter of philosophy) that if the world be really incorrigible in this respect, it is a reflection to make one sad, not angry. We may laugh or weep at the madness of mankind: we have no right to vilify them, for our own sakes or theirs. Misanthropy is not the disgust of the mind at human nature, but with itself; or it is laying its own exaggerated vices and foul blots at the door of others! Do not, however, mistake what I have here said. I would not have you, when you grow up, adopt the low and sordid fashion of palliating existing abuses or of putting the best face upon the worst things. I only mean that indiscriminate unqualified satire can do little good, and that those who indulge in the most revolting speculations on human nature do not themselves always set the fairest examples, or strive to prevent its lower degradation. They seem rather willing

to reduce it to their theoretical standard. For the rest, the very outcry that is made (if sincere) shews that things cannot be quite so bad as they are represented. The abstract hatred and scorn of vice implies the capacity for virtue: the impatience expressed at the most striking instances of deformity proves the innate idea and love of beauty in the human mind. The best antidote I can recommend to you hereafter against the disheartening effect of such writings as those of Rochefoucault, Mandeville, and others, will be to look at the pictures of Raphael and Correggio. You need not be altogether ashamed, my dear little boy, of belonging to a species which could produce such faces as those; nor despair of doing something worthy of a laudable ambition, when you see what such hands have wrought! You will, perhaps, one day have reason to thank me for this advice.

As to your studies and school-exercises, I wish you to learn Latin, French, and dancing. I would insist upon the last more particularly, both because it is more likely to be neglected, and because it is of the greatest consequence to your success in life. Every thing almost depends upon first impressions; and these depend (besides *person*, which is not in our power) upon two things, *dress* and *address*, which every one may command with proper attention. These are the small coin in the intercourse of life

which are continually in request; and perhaps you will find at the year's end, or towards the close of life, that the daily insults, coldness, or contempt, to which you have been exposed by a neglect of such superficial recommendations, are hardly atoned for by the few proofs of esteem or admiration which your integrity or talents have been able to extort in the course of it. When we habitually disregard those things which we know will ensure the favourable opinion of others, it shews we set that opinion at defiance, or consider ourselves above it, which no one ever did with impunity. An inattention to our own persons implies a disrespect to others, and may often be traced no less to a want of good-nature than of good sense. The old maxim—*Desire to please, and you will infallibly please*—explains the whole matter. If there is a tendency to vanity and affectation on this side of the question, there is an equal alloy of pride and obstinacy on the opposite one. Slovenliness may at any time be cured by an effort of resolution, but a graceful carriage requires an early habit, and in most cases the aid of the dancing-master. I would not have you, from not knowing how to enter a room properly, stumble at the very threshold in the good graces of those on whom it is possible the fate of your future life may depend. Nothing creates a greater prejudice against any one than awkwardness. A

person who is confused in manner and gesture seems to have done something wrong, or as if he was conscious of no one qualification to build a confidence in himself upon. On the other hand, openness, freedom, self-possession, set others at ease with you by shewing that you are on good terms with yourself. Grace in women gains the affections sooner, and secures them longer, than any thing else—it is an outward and visible sign of an inward harmony of soul—as the want of it in men, as if the mind and body equally hitched in difficulties and were distracted with doubts, is the greatest impediment in the career of gallantry and road to the female heart. Another thing I would caution you against is not to pore over your books till you are bent almost double—a habit you will never be able to get the better of, and which you will find of serious ill consequence. *A stoop in the shoulders* sinks a man in public and in private estimation. You are at present straight enough, and you walk with boldness and spirit. Do nothing to take away the use of your limbs, or the spring and elasticity of your muscles. As to all worldly advantages, it is to the full of as much importance that your deportment should be erect and manly as your actions.

You will naturally find out all this and fall into it, if your attention is drawn out sufficiently to what is passing around you; and this will be

the case, unless you are absorbed too much in books and those sedentary studies,

"Which waste the marrow, and consume the brain."

You are, I think, too fond of reading as it is. As one means of avoiding excess in this way, I would wish you to make it a rule, never to read at meal-times, nor in company when there is any (even the most trivial) conversation going on, nor even to let your eagerness to learn encroach upon your play-hours. Books are but one inlet of knowledge; and the pores of the mind, like those of the body, should be left open to all impressions. I applied too close to my studies, soon after I was of your age, and hurt myself irreparably by it. Whatever may be the value of learning, health and good spirits are of more.

I would have you, as I said, make yourself master of French, because you may find it of use in the commerce of life; and I would have you learn Latin, partly because I learnt it myself, and I would not have you without any of the advantages or sources of knowledge that I possessed—it would be a bar of separation between us—and secondly, because there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground, to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar. Shut out from this garden of early sweetness, we may well exclaim—

"How shall we part and wander down
Into a lower world, to this obscure
And wild? How shall we breathe in other air
Less pure, accustom'd to immortal fruits?"

I do not think the classics so indispensable to the cultivation of your intellect as on another account, which I have seen explained elsewhere, and you will have no objection to turn with me to the passages. "The study of the classics is less to be regarded as an exercise of the intellect, than as *a discipline of humanity*. The peculiar advantage of this mode of education consists not so much in strengthening the understanding, as in softening and refining the taste. It gives men liberal views; it accustoms the mind to take an interest in things foreign to itself; to love virtue for its own sake; to prefer fame to life, and glory to riches; and to fix our thoughts on the remote and permanent, instead of narrow and fleeting objects. It teaches us to believe that there is something really great and excellent in the world, surviving all the shocks of accident and fluctuations of opinion, and raises us above that low and servile fear, which bows only to present power and upstart authority. Rome and Athens filled a place in the history of mankind, which can never be occupied again. They were two cities set on a hill, which could not be hid; all eyes have seen them, and their light shines like a mighty sea-mark into the abyss of time.

'Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands ;
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
Destructive war, and all-involving age.
Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise !
Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow !'

It is this feeling more than anything else which produces a marked difference between the study of the ancient and modern languages, and which by the weight and importance of the consequences attached to the former, stamps every word with a monumental firmness. By conversing with the *mighty dead*, we imbibe sentiment with knowledge. We become strongly attached to those who can no longer either hurt or serve us, except through the influence which they exert over the mind. We feel the presence of that power which gives immortality to human thoughts and actions, and catch the flame of enthusiasm from all nations and ages."

Because, however, you have learnt Latin and Greek, and can speak a different language, do not fancy yourself of a different order of beings from those you ordinarily converse with. They perhaps know and can do more *things* than you, though you have learnt a greater variety of *names* to express the same thing by. The great object, indeed, of these studies is, to be "a cure

for a narrow and selfish spirit," and to carry the mind out of its petty and local prejudices to the idea of a more general humanity. Do not fancy, because you are intimate with Homer and Virgil that your neighbours who can never attain the same posthumous fame are to be despised, like those impudent valets who live in noble families and look down upon every one else. Though you are master of Cicero's 'Orations,' think it possible for a cobbler at a stall to be more eloquent than you. "But you are a scholar, and he is not." Well, then, you have that advantage over him, but it does not follow that you are to have every other. Look at the heads of the celebrated poets and philosophers of antiquity in the collection at Wilton, and you will say they answer to their works; but you will find others in the same collection whose names have hardly come down to us that are equally fine, and cast in the same classic mould. Do you imagine that all the thoughts, genius, and capacity of those old and mighty nations are contained in a few odd volumes, to be thumbed by school-boys? This reflection is not meant to lessen your admiration of the great names to which you will be accustomed to look up, but to direct it to that solid mass of intellect and power of which they were the most shining ornaments. I would wish you to excel in this sort of learning and to take a pleasure in it, because it is the

path that has been chosen for you; but do not suppose that others do not excel equally in their line of study or exercise of skill, or that there is but one mode of excellence in art or nature. You have got on vastly beyond the point at which you set out; but others have been getting on as well as you in the same or other ways, and have kept pace with you. What then, you may ask, is the use of all the pains you have taken, if it gives you no superiority over mankind in general? It is this—You have reaped all the benefit of improvement and knowledge yourself; and farther, if you had not moved forwards, you would by this time have been left behind. Envy no one, disparage no one, think yourself above no one. Their demerits will not piece out your deficiencies; nor is it a waste of time and labour for you to cultivate your own talents, because you cannot bespeak a monopoly of all advantages. You are more learned than many of your acquaintance who may be more active, healthy, witty, successful in business, or expert in some elegant or useful art than you; but you have no reason to complain, if you have attained the object of your ambition. Or if you should not be able to compass this from a want of genius or parts, yet learn, my child, to be contented with a mediocrity of acquirements. You may still be respectable in your conduct, and enjoy a tranquil obscurity, with

more friends and fewer enemies than you might otherwise have had.

There is one almost certain drawback on a course of scholastic study, that it unfits men for active life. The *ideal* is always at variance with the *practical*. The habit of fixing the attention on the imaginary and abstracted deprives the mind equally of energy and fortitude. By indulging our imaginations on fictions and chimeras, where we have it all our own way and are led on only by the pleasure of the prospect, we grow fastidious, effeminate, lapped in idle luxury, impatient of contradiction, and unable to sustain the shock of real adversity, when it comes; as by being taken up with abstract reasoning or remote events in which we are merely passive spectators, we have no resources to provide against it, no readiness, or expedients for the occasion, or spirit to use them, even if they occur. We must think again before we determine, and thus the opportunity for action is lost. While we are considering the very best possible mode of gaining an object, we find that it has slipped through our fingers, or that others have laid rude, fearless hands upon it. The youthful tyro reluctantly discovers that the ways of the world are not his ways, nor their thoughts his thoughts. Perhaps the old monastic institutions were not in this respect unwise, which carried on to the end of life the

secluded habits and romantic associations with which it began, and which created a privileged world for the inhabitants, distinct from the common world of men and women. You will bring with you from your books and solitary reveries a wrong measure of men and things, unless you correct it by careful experience and mixed observation. You will raise your standard of character as much too high at first as from disappointed expectation it will sink too low afterwards. The best qualifier of this theoretical *mania* and of the dreams of poets and moralists (who both treat of things as *they ought to be* and not as *they are*) is in one sense to be found in some of our own popular writers, such as our Novelists and periodical Essayists. But you had, after all, better wait and see what things are, than try to anticipate the results. You know more of a road by having travelled it than by all the conjectures and descriptions in the world. You will find the business of life conducted on a much more varied and individual scale than you would expect. People will be concerned about a thousand things that you have no idea of, and will be utterly indifferent to what you feel the greatest interest in. You will find good and evil, folly and discretion more mingled, and the shades of character running more into each other than they do in the ethical charts. No one is equally wise or guarded at all points, and

it is seldom that any one is quite a fool. Do not be surprised, when you go out into the world, to find men talk exceedingly well on different subjects, who do not derive their information immediately from books. In the first place, the light of books is diffused very much abroad in the world in conversation and at second-hand; and besides, common sense is not a monopoly, and experience and observation are sources of information open to the man of the world as well as to the retired student. If you know more of the outline and principles, he knows more of the details and "practique part of life." A man may discuss very agreeably the adventures of a campaign in which he was engaged without having read the *Retreat of the Ten Thousand*, or give a singular account of the method of drying teas in China without being a profound chemist. It is the vice of scholars to suppose that there is no knowledge in the world but that of books. Do you avoid it, I conjure you; and thereby save yourself the pain and mortification that must otherwise ensue from finding out your mistake continually!

Gravity is one great ingredient in the conduct of life, and perhaps a certain share of it is hardly to be dispensed with. Few people can afford to be quite unaffected. At any rate, do not put your worst qualities foremost. Do not seek to distinguish yourself by being ridiculous; nor

entertain that miserable ambition to be the sport and butt of the company. By aiming at a certain standard of behaviour or intellect, you will at least show your taste and value for what is excellent. There are those who *blurt* out their good things with so little heed of what they are about that no one thinks anything of them; as others by keeping their folly to themselves gain the reputation of wisdom. Do not, however, affect to speak only in oracles, or to deal in *bon-mots:* condescend to the level of the company, and be free and accessible to all persons. Express whatever occurs to you, that cannot offend others or hurt yourself. Keep some opinions to yourself. Say what you please of others, but never repeat what you hear said of them to themselves. If you have nothing yourself to offer, laugh with the witty,—assent to the wise: they will not think the worse of you for it. Listen to information on subjects you are acquainted with, instead of always striving to lead the conversation to some favourite one of your own. By the last method you will shine, but will not improve. I am ashamed myself ever to open my lips on any question I have ever written upon. It is much more difficult to be able to converse on an equality with a number of persons in turn, than to soar above their heads, and excite the stupid gaze of all companies by bestriding some senseless topic of your

own and confounding the understandings of those who are ignorant of it. Be not too fond of argument. Indeed, by going much into company (which I do not, however, wish you to do) you will be weaned from this practice, if you set out with it. Rather suggest what remarks may have occurred to you on a subject than aim at dictating your opinions to others or at defending yourself at all points. You will learn more by agreeing in the main with others and entering into their trains of thinking, than by contradicting and urging them to extremities. Avoid singularity of opinion as well as of everything else. Sound conclusions come with practical knowledge, rather than with speculative refinements: in what we really understand, we reason but little. Long-winded disputes fill up the place of common sense and candid inquiry. Do not imagine that you will make people friends by showing your superiority over them: it is what they will neither admit nor forgive, unless you have a high and acknowledged reputation beforehand, which renders this sort of petty vanity more inexcusable. Seek to gain the good-will of others rather than to extort their applause; and to this end, be neither too tenacious of your own claims, nor inclined to press too hard on their weaknesses.

Do not affect the society of your superiors in rank, nor court that of the great. There can be

no real sympathy in either case. The first will consider you as a restraint upon them, and the last as an intruder; or *upon sufferance.* It is not a desirable distinction to be admitted into company as a man of talents. You are a mark for invidious observation. If you say nothing, or merely behave with common propriety and simplicity, you seem to have no business there. If you make a studied display of yourself, it is arrogating a consequence you have no right to. If you are contented to pass as an indifferent person, they despise you; if you distinguish yourself, and show more knowledge, wit, or taste than they do, they hate you for it. You have no alternative. I would rather be asked out to sing than to talk. Every one does not pretend to a fine voice, but every one fancies he has as much understanding as another. Indeed, the secret of this sort of intercourse has been pretty well found out. Literary men are seldom invited to the tables of the great; they send for players and musicians, as they keep monkeys and parrots!

I would not, however, have you run away with a notion that the rich are knaves, or that lords are fools. They are for what I know as honest and as wise as other people. But it is a trick of our self-love, supposing that another has the decided advantage of us in one way, to strike a balance by taking it for granted (as a

moral antithesis) that he must be as much beneath us in those qualities on which we plume ourselves, and which we would appropriate almost entirely to our own use. It is hard indeed if others are raised above us not only by the gifts of fortune, but of understanding too. It is not to be credited. People have an unwillingness to admit that the House of Lords can be equal in talent to the House of Commons. So in the other sex, if a woman is handsome, she is an idiot or no better than she should be: in ours, if a man is worth a million of money, he is a miser, a fellow that cannot spell his own name, or a poor creature in some way, to bring him to our level. This is malice, and not truth. Believe all the good you can of every one. Do not measure others by yourself. If they have advantages which you have not, let your liberality keep pace with their good fortune. Envy no one, and you need envy no one. If you have but the magnanimity to allow merit wherever you see it—understanding in a lord or wit in a cobbler—this temper of mind will stand you instead of many accomplishments. Think no man too happy. Raphael died young. Milton had the misfortune to be blind. If any one is vain or proud, it is from folly or ignorance. Those who pique themselves excessively on some one thing have but that one thing to pique themselves upon, as languages, mechanics, &c. I do

not say that this is not an enviable delusion where it is not liable to be disturbed; but at present knowledge is too much diffused and pretensions come too much into collision for this to be long the case; and it is better not to form such a prejudice at first than to have it to undo all the rest of one's life. If you learn any two things, though they may put you out of conceit one with the other, they will effectually cure you of any conceit you might have of yourself by showing the variety and scope there is in the human mind beyond the limits you had set to it.

You were convinced the first day that you could not learn Latin, which now you find easy. Be taught from this, not to think other obstacles insurmountable that you may meet with in the course of your life, though they seem so at first sight.

Attend above all things to your health; or rather, do nothing wilfully to impair it. Use exercise, abstinence, and regular hours. Drink water when you are alone, and wine or very little spirits in company. It is the last that are ruinous by leading to unlimited excess. There is not the same headlong *impetus* in wine. But one glass of brandy and water makes you want another, that other makes you want a third, and so on in an increased proportion. Therefore no one can stop midway who does not possess the

resolution to abstain altogether; for the inclination is sharpened with its indulgence. Never gamble. Or if you play for any thing, never do so for what will give you uneasiness the next day. Be not precise in these matters; but do not pass certain limits, which it is difficult to recover. Do nothing in the irritation of the moment, but take time to reflect. Because you have done one foolish thing do not do another; nor throw away your health, or reputation, or comfort, to thwart impertinent advice. Avoid a spirit of contradiction, both in words and actions. Do not aim at what is beyond your reach, but at what is within it. Indulge in calm and pleasing pursuits, rather than violent excitements; and learn to conquer your own will, instead of striving to obtain the mastery of that of others.

With respect to your friends, I would wish you to choose them neither from caprice nor accident, and to adhere to them as long as you can. Do not make a surfeit of friendship, through over sanguine enthusiasm, nor expect it to last for ever. Always speak well of those with whom you have once been intimate, or take some part of the censure you bestow on them to yourself. Never quarrel with tried friends, or those whom you wish to continue such. Wounds of this kind are sure to open again. When once the prejudice is removed

that sheathes defects, familiarity only causes jealousy and distrust. Do not keep on with a mockery of friendship after the substance is gone—but part, while you can part friends. Bury the carcase of friendship: it is not worth embalming.

As to the books you will have to read by choice or for amusement, the best are the commonest. The names of many of them are already familiar to you. Read them as you grow up with all the satisfaction in your power, and make much of them. It is perhaps the greatest pleasure you will have in life, the one you will think of longest, and repent of least. If my life had been more full of calamity than it has been (much more than I hope yours will be) I would live it over again, my poor little boy, to have read the books I did in my youth.

In politics I wish you to be an honest man, but no brawler. Hate injustice and falsehood for your own sake. Be neither a martyr nor a sycophant. Wish well to the world without expecting to see it much better than it is; and do not gratify the enemies of liberty by putting yourself at their mercy, if it can be avoided with honour.

If you ever marry, I would wish you to marry the woman you like. Do not be guided by the recommendation of friends. Nothing will atone for or overcome an original distaste. It will

only increase from intimacy; and if you are to live separate, it is better not to come together. There is no use in dragging a chain through life, unless it binds one to the object we love. Choose a mistress from among your equals. You will be able to understand her character better, and she will be more likely to understand yours. Those in an inferior station to yourself will doubt your good intentions, and misapprehend your plainest expressions. All that you swear is to them a riddle or downright nonsense. You cannot by possibility translate your thoughts into their dialect. They will be ignorant of the meaning of half you say, and laugh at the rest. As mistresses, they will have no sympathy with you; and as wives, you can have none with them. But they will do all they can to thwart you, and to retrieve themselves in their own opinion by trick and low cunning. No woman ever married into a family above herself that did not try to make all the mischief she could in it. Be not in haste to marry, nor to engage your affections, where there is no probability of a return. Do not fancy every woman you see the heroine of a romance, a Sophia Western, a Clarissa, or a Julia; and yourself the potential hero of it, Tom Jones, Lovelace, or St Preux. Avoid this error as you would shrink back from a precipice. All your fine sentiments and romantic notions will (of themselves) make no

more impression on one of these delicate creatures, than on a piece of marble. Their soft bosoms are steel to your amorous refinements, if you have no other pretensions. It is not what you think of them that determines their choice, but what they think of you. Endeavour, if you would escape lingering torments, and the gnawing of the worm that dies not, to find out this, and to abide by the issue. We trifle with, make sport of, and despise those who are attached to us, and follow those that fly from us. "We hunt the wind,—we worship a statue,—cry aloud to the desert." Do you, my dear boy, stop short in this career if you find yourself setting out in it, and make up your mind to this, that, if a woman does not like you of her own accord, that is, from involuntary impressions, nothing you can say or do or suffer for her sake will make her, but will set her the more against you. So the song goes—

> "Quit, quit for shame; this will not move:
> If of herself she will not love,
> Nothing will make her, the devil take her!"

Your pain is her triumph; the more she feels you in her power, the worse she will treat you: the more you make it appear you deserve her regard, the more will she resent it as an imputation on her first judgment. Study first impressions above all things; for everything depends on

them, in love especially. Women are armed by nature and education with a power of resisting the importunity of men, and they use this power according to their discretion. They enforce it to the utmost rigour of the law against those whom they do not like, and relax their extreme severity proportionably in favour of those that they do like, and who in general care as little about them. Hence we see so many desponding lovers and forlorn damsels. Love in women (at least) is either vanity, or interest, or fancy. It is a merely selfish feeling. It has nothing to do (I am sorry to say) with friendship, or esteem, or even pity. I once asked a girl, the pattern of her sex in shape and mind and attractions, whether she did not think Mr Coleridge had done wrong in making the heroine of his beautiful ballad story of Geneviève take compassion on her hapless lover—

> "When on the yellow forest-leaves
> A dying man he lay—"

And whether she believed that any woman ever fell in love through a sense of compassion; and she made answer—"Not if it was against her inclination!" I would take this lady's word for a thousand pounds on this point. Pain holds antipathy to pleasure; pity is not akin to love; a dying man has more need of a nurse than of a

mistress. There is no forcing liking. It is as little to be fostered by reason and good-nature as it can be controlled by prudence or propriety. It is a mere blind, headstrong impulse. Least of all, flatter yourself that talents or virtue will recommend you to the favour of the sex in lieu of exterior advantages. Oh! no. Women care nothing about poets, or philosophers, or politicians. They go by a man's looks and manner. Richardson calls them "an eye-judging sex;" and I am sure he knew more about them than I can pretend to do. If you run away with a pedantic notion that they care a pin's point about your head or your heart, you will repent it too late. Some blue-stocking may have her vanity flattered by your reputation, or be edified by the solution of a metaphysical problem, or a critical remark, or a dissertation on the state of the nation, and fancy that she has a taste for intellect and is an epicure in sentiment. No true woman ever regarded anything but her lover's person and address. Gravity will here answer all the same purpose without understanding, gaiety without wit, folly without good-nature, and impudence without any other pretension. The natural and instinctive passion of love is excited by qualities not peculiar to artists, authors, and men of letters. It is not the jest but the laugh that follows, not the sentiment but

the glance that accompanies it, that *tells*—in a word, the sense of actual enjoyment that imparts itself to others, and excites mutual understanding and inclination. Authors, on the other hand, feel nothing spontaneously. The common incidents and circumstances of life with which others are taken up, make no alteration in them, nor provoke any of the common expressions or surprise, joy, admiration, anger, or merriment. Nothing stirs their blood or accelerates their juices or tickles their veins. Instead of yielding to the first natural and lively impulses of things, in which they would find sympathy, they screw themselves up to some far-fetched view of the subject in order to be unintelligible. Realities are not good enough for them, till they undergo the process of imagination and reflection. If you offer them your hand to shake, they will hardly take it; for this does not amount to a proposition. If you enter their room suddenly, they testify neither surprise nor satisfaction: no new idea is elicited by it. Yet if you suppose this to be a repulse, you are mistaken. They will enter into your affairs or combat your ideas with all the warmth and vehemence imaginable as soon as they have a subject started. But their faculty for thinking must be set in motion, before you can put any soul into them. They are intellectual dram-drinkers; and without their necessary stimulus, are torpid, dead, in-

sensible to everything. They have great life of mind, but none of body. They do not drift with the stream of company or of passing occurrences, but are straining at some hyberbole, or striking out a bye-path of their own. Follow them who list. Their minds are a sort of Herculaneum, full of old, petrified images;—are set in stereotype, and little fitted to the ordinary occasions of life.

What chance, then, can they have with women, who deal only in the pantomime of discourse, in gesticulation and the flippant bye-play of the senses, "nods and winks and wreathed smiles;" and to whom to offer a remark is an impertinence, or a reason an affront? The only way in which I ever knew mental qualities or distinction tell was in the clerical character; and women do certainly incline to this with some sort of favourable regard. Whether it is that the sanctity of pretension piques curiosity, or that the habitual submission of their understandings to their spiritual guides subdues the will, a popular preacher generally has the choice among the *élite* of his female flock. According to Mrs Inchbald (see her 'Simple Story') there is another reason why religious courtship is not without its charms! But as I do not intend you for the church, do not, in thinking to study yourself into the good graces of the fair, study yourself out of them,

millions of miles. Do not place thought as a barrier between you and love: do not abstract yourself into the regions of truth, far from the smile of earthly beauty. Let not the cloud sit upon your brow: let not the canker sink into your heart. Look up, laugh loud, talk big, keep the colour in your cheek and the fire in your eye, adorn your person, maintain your health, your beauty, and your animal spirits, and you will pass for a fine man. But should you let your blood stagnate in some deep metaphysical question, or refine too much in your ideas of the sex, forgetting yourself in a dream of exalted perfection, you will want an eye to cheer you, a hand to guide you, a bosom to lean on, and will stagger into your grave, old before your time, unloved and unlovely. If you feel that you have not the necessary advantages of person, confidence, and manner, and that it is *up-hill* work with you to gain the ear of beauty, quit the pursuit at once, and seek for other satisfactions and consolations.

A spider, my dear, the meanest creature that crawls or lives, has its mate or fellow: but a scholar has no mate or fellow. For myself, I had courted thought, I had felt pain; and Love turned away his face from me. I have gazed along the silent air for that smile which had lured me to my doom. I no more heard those accents which would have burst upon me like a

voice from heaven. I loathed the light that shone on my disgrace. Hours, days, years passed away; and only turned false hope to fixed despair. And as my frail bark sails down the stream of time, the God of Love stands on the shore, and as I stretch out my hands to him in vain, claps his wings, and mocks me as I pass!

There is but one other point on which I meant to speak to you, and that is the choice of a profession. This, probably, had better be left to time or accident or your own inclination. You have a very fine ear, but I have somehow a prejudice against men-singers, and indeed against the stage altogether. It is an uncertain and ungrateful soil. All professions are bad that depend on reputation, which is "as often got without merit as lost without deserving." Yet I cannot easily reconcile myself to your being a slave to business, and I shall be hardly able to leave you an independence. A situation in a public office is secure, but laborious and mechanical, and without the two great springs of life, Hope and Fear. Perhaps, however, it might ensure you a competence, and leave you leisure for some other favourite amusement or pursuit. I have said all reputation is hazardous, hard to win, harder to keep. Many never attain a glimpse of what they have all their lives been looking for, and others survive a passing shadow of it. Yet if I were to name one pursuit rather

than another, I should wish you to be a good painter, if such a thing could be hoped. I have failed in this myself, and should wish you to be able to do what I have not—to paint like Claude or Rembrandt or Guido or Vandyke, if it were possible. Artists, I think, who have succeeded in their chief object, live to be old, and are agreeable old men. Their minds keep alive to the last. Cosway's spirits never flagged till after ninety, and Nollekins, though nearly blind, passed all his mornings in giving directions about some group or bust in his workshop. You have seen Mr Northcote, that delightful specimen of the last age. With what avidity he takes up his pencil, or lays it down again to talk of numberless things! His eye has not lost its lustre, nor "paled its ineffectual fire." His body is a shadow: he himself is a pure spirit. There is a kind of immortality about this sort of ideal and visionary existence that dallies with Fate and baffles the grim monster, Death. If I thought you could make as clever an artist and arrive at such an agreeable old age as Mr Northcote, I should declare at once for your devoting yourself to this enchanting profession; and in that reliance, should feel less regret at some of my own disappointments, and little anxiety on your account!

ESSAY XVII.

THE SHYNESS OF SCHOLARS.

"And of his port as meek as is a maid."

SCHOLARS lead a contemplative and retired life, both which circumstances must be supposed to contribute to the effect in question. A life of study is also conversant with high and *ideal* models, which gives an ambitious turn to the mind; and pride is nearly akin to delicacy of feeling.

That a life of privacy and obscurity should render its votaries bashful and awkward, or unfit them for the routine of society from the want both of a habit of going into company and from ignorance of its usages, is obvious to remark. No one can be expected to do that well or without a certain degree of hesitation and restraint, which he is not accustomed to do except on particular occasions, and at rare intervals. You

might as rationally set a scholar or a clown on a tight-rope and expect them to dance gracefully and with every appearance of ease, as introduce either into the gay, laughing circle, and suppose that he will acquit himself handsomely and come off with applause in the retailing of anecdote or the interchange of repartee. "If you have not seen the court, your manners must be naught; and if your manners are naught, you must be damned," according to Touchstone's reasoning. The other cause lies rather deeper, and is so far better worth considering, perhaps. A student, then, that is, a man who condemns himself to toil for a length of time and through a number of volumes in order to arrive at a conclusion, naturally loses that smartness and ease which distinguish the gay and thoughtless rattler. There is a certain elasticity of movement and hey-day of the animal spirits seldom to be met with but in those who have never cared for anything beyond the moment, or looked lower than the surface. The scholar having to encounter doubts and difficulties on all hands, and indeed to apply by way of preference to those subjects which are most beset with mystery, becomes hesitating, sceptical, irresolute, absent, dull. All the processes of his mind are slow, cautious, circuitous, instead of being prompt, heedless, straightforward. Finding the intricacies of the path increase upon him

in every direction, this can hardly be supposed to add to the lightness of his step, the confidence of his brow as he advances. He does not skim the surface, but dives under it like the mole to make his way darkling, by imperceptible degrees, and throwing up heaps of dirt and rubbish over his head to track his progress. He is therefore startled at any sudden light, puzzled by any casual question, taken unawares and at a disadvantage in every critical emergency. He must have time given him to collect his thoughts, to consider objections, to make farther inquiries, and come to no conclusion at last. This is very different from the dashing, *off-hand* manner of the mere man of business or fashion; and he who is repeatedly found in situations to which he is unequal (particularly if he is of a reflecting and candid temper) will be apt to look foolish, and to lose both his countenance and his confidence in himself—at least as to the opinion others entertain of him, and the figure he is likely on any occasion to make in the eyes of the world. The course of his studies has not made him wise, but has taught him the uncertainty of wisdom; and has supplied him with excellent reasons for suspending his judgment, when another would throw the casting-weight of his own presumption or interest into the scale.

The inquirer after truth learns to take nothing

for granted; least of all, to make an assumption of his own superior merits. He would have nothing proceed without proper proofs and an exact scrutiny; and would neither be imposed upon himself, nor impose upon others by shallow and hasty appearances. It takes years of patient toil and devoted enthusiasm to master any art of science; and after all, the success is doubtful. He infers that other triumphs must be prepared in like manner at an humble distance: he cannot bring himself to imagine that any object worth seizing on or deserving of regard can be carried by a *coup de main*. So far from being proud or puffed up by them, he would be ashamed and degraded in his own opinion by any advantages that were to be obtained by such cheap and vulgar means as putting a good face on the matter, as strutting and vapouring about his own pretensions. He would not place himself on a level with bullies or coxcombs; nor believe that those whose favour he covets can be the dupes of either. Whatever is excellent in his fanciful creed is hard of attainment; and he would (perhaps absurdly enough) have the means in all cases answerable to the end. He knows that there are difficulties in his favourite pursuits to puzzle the will, to tire the patience, to unbrace the strongest nerves, and make the stoutest courage quail; and he would fain think that if there is

any object more worthy than another to call forth the earnest solicitude, the hopes and fears of a wise man, and to make his heart yearn within him at the most distant prospect of success, this precious prize in the grand lottery of life is not to be had for the asking for, or from the mere easy indifference or overbearing effrontery with which you put in your claim. He is aware that it will be long enough before any one paints a fine picture by walking up and down and admiring himself in the glass; or writes a fine poem by being delighted with the sound of his own voice; or solves a single problem in philosophy by swaggering and haughty airs. He conceives that it is the same with the way of the world—woos the fair as he woos the Muse; in conversation never puts in a word till he has something better to say than any one else in the room; in business never strikes while the iron is hot, and flings away all his advantages by endeavouring to prove to his own and the satisfaction of others, that he is clearly entitled to them. It never once enters into his head (till it is too late) that impudence is the current coin in the affairs of life; that he who doubts his own merit, never has credit given him by others; that Fortune does not stay to have her overtures canvassed; that he who neglects opportunity, can seldom command it a second time; that the world judge by appear-

ances, not by realities; and that they sympathise more readily with those who are prompt to do themselves justice, and to show off their various qualifications or enforce their pretensions to the utmost, than with those who wait for others to award their claims, and carry their fastidious refinement into helplessness and imbecility. Thus "fools rush in where angels fear to tread;" and modest merits finds to its cost, that the bold hand and dauntless brow succeed where timidity and bashfulness are pushed aside; that the gay, laughing eye is preferred to dejection and gloom, health and animal spirits to the shattered, sickly frame and trembling nerves; and that to succeed in life, a man should carry about with him the outward and incontrovertible signs of success, and of his satisfaction with himself and his prospects, instead of plaguing every body near him with fantastical scruples and his ridiculous anxiety to realise an unattainable standard of perfection. From holding back himself, the speculative enthusiast is thrust back by others: his pretensions are insulted and trampled on; and the repeated and pointed repulses he meets with, make him still more unwilling to encounter, and more unable to contend with those that await him in the prosecution of his career. He therefore retires from the contest altogether, or remains in the back-ground, a passive but uneasy spectator of a scene, in which he finds from

experience, that confidence, alertness, and superficial acquirements are of more avail than all the refinement and delicacy in the world. Action, in truth, is referable chiefly to quickness and strength of resolution, rather than to depth of reasoning or scrupulous nicety: again, it is to be presumed that those who show a proper reliance on themselves, will not betray the trust we place in them through pusillanimity or want of spirit: in what relates to the opinion of others, which is often formed hastily and on slight acquaintance, much must be allowed to what strikes the senses, to what excites the imagination; and in all popular worldly schemes, popular and worldly means must be resorted to, instead of depending wholly on the hidden and intrinsic merits of the case.

"In peace, there's nothing so becómes a man
As modest stillness, and humility:
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,
Then imitate the action of the tiger;
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage:
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;
Let it pry through the portage of the head,
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it,
As fearfully as doth a galled rock
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean."

This advice (sensible as it is) is abhorrent to the nature of a man who is accustomed to place

all his hopes of victory in reasoning and reflection only. The noisy, rude, gratuitous success of those who have taken so much less pains to deserve it, disgusts and disheartens him—he loses his self-possession and self-esteem, has no standard left by which to measure himself or others, and as he cannot be brought to admire them, persuades himself at last that the blame rests with himself; and instead of bespeaking a fashionable dress, learning to bow, or taking a few lessons in boxing or fencing to brace his nerves and raise his spirits, aggravates all his former faults by way of repairing them, grows more jealous of the propriety of every word and look, lowers his voice into a whisper, gives his style the last polish, reconsiders his arguments, refines his sentiments till they evaporate in a sigh, and thus satisfies himself that he can hardly fail; that men judge impartially in the end, that the public will sooner or later do him justice, Fortune smile, and the Fair no longer be averse! *Oh malore!* He is just where he was, or ten times worse off than ever.

There is another circumstance that tends not a little to perplex the judgment, and add to the difficulties of the retired student, when he comes out into the world. He is like one dropped from the clouds. He has hitherto conversed chiefly with historic personages and abstract propositions, and has no just notion of actual

men and things. He does not well know how to reconcile the sweeping conclusions he has been taught to indulge in to the cautious and pliant maxims of the world, nor how to compare himself, an inhabitant of Utopia, with sublunary mortals. He has been habituated all his life to look up to a few great names handed down by virtue or science as the "gods of his idolatry," as the fixed stars in the firmament of reputation, and to have some respect for himself and other learned men as votaries at the shrine and as appreciating the merits of their idol; but all the rest of the world, who are neither the objects of this sort of homage, nor concerned as a sort of priesthood in collecting and paying it, he looks upon as actually nobody, or as worms crawling upon the face of the earth without intellectual value or pretensions. He is, therefore, a little surprised and shocked to find, when he deigns to mingle with his fellows, those every-day mortals, on ordinary terms, that they are of a height nearly equal to himself, that they have words, ideas, feelings in common with the best, and are not the mere cyphers he had been led to consider them. From having under-rated, he comes to over-rate them. Having dreamt of no such thing, he is more struck with what he finds than perhaps it deserves; magnifies the least glimpse of sense or humour into sterling wit or wisdom; is startled by any objection

from so unexpected a quarter; thinks his own advantages of no avail, because they are not the only ones, and shrinks from an encounter with weapons he has not been used to, and from a struggle by which he feels himself degraded. The Knight of La Mancha, when soundly beaten by the packstaves of the Yanguesian carriers, laid all the blame on his having condescended to fight with plebeians. The pride of learning comes in to aid the awkwardness and bashfulness of the inexperienced novice, converting his want of success into the shame and mortification of defeat in what he habitually considers as a contest with inferiors. Indeed, those will always be found to submit with the worst grace to any check or reverse of this kind in common conversation or reasoning, who have been taught to set the most exclusive and disproportioned value on letters: and the most enlightened and accomplished scholars will be less likely to be humbled or put to the blush by the display of common sense or native talent, than the more ignorant, self-sufficient, and pedantic among the learned; for that ignorance, self-sufficiency, and pedantry, are sometimes to be reckoned among the attributes of learning, cannot be disputed. These qualities are not very reconcilable with modest merit; but they are quite consistent with a great deal of blundering, confusion, and want of *tact* in the commerce of the world. The genuine

scholar retires from an unequal conflict into silence and obscurity: the pedant swells into self-importance, and renders himself conspicuous by pompous arrogance and absurdity.

It is hard upon those who have ever taken pains or done any thing to distinguish themselves, that they are seldom the trumpeters of their own achievements; and I believe it may be laid down as a rule, that we receive just as much homage from others as we exact from them by our own declarations, looks, and manner. But no one who has performed any thing great looks big upon it: those who have anv thing to boast of are generally silent on that head, and altogether shy of the subject. With Coriolanus, they "will not have their nothings monster'd." From familiarity, his own acquirements do not appear so extraordinary to the individual as to others; and there is a natural want of sympathy in this respect. No one who is really capable of great things is proud or vain of his success; for he thinks more of what he had hoped or has failed to do, than of what he has done. A habit of extreme exertion, or of anxious suspense, is not one of buoyant overweening self-complacency: those who have all their lives tasked their faculties to the utmost, may be supposed to have quite enough to do without having much disposition left to anticipate their success with confidence, or to glory

in it afterwards. The labours of the mind, like the drudgery of the body, depress and take away the usual alacrity of the spirits. Nor can such persons be lifted up with the event; for the impression of the consequences to result from any arduous undertaking must be light and vain, compared with the toil and anxiety accompanying it. It is only those who have done nothing, who fancy they can do everything; or who have leisure and inclination to admire themselves. To sit before a glass and smile delighted at our own image, is merely a tax on our egotism and self-conceit; and these are resources not easily exhausted in some persons; or if they are, the deficiency is supplied by flatterers who surround the vain, like a natural atmosphere. Fools who take all their opinions at second-hand cannot resist the coxcomb's delight in himself; or it might be said that folly is the natural mirror of vanity. The greatest heroes, it has often been observed, do not show it in their faces; nor do philosophers affect to be thought wise. Little minds triumph on small occasions, or over puny competitors: the loftiest wish for higher opportunities of signalising themselves, or compare themselves with those models that leave them no room for flippant exultation. Either great things are accomplished with labour and pains, which stamp their impression on the general cha-

racter and tone of feeling; or if this should not be the case (as sometimes happens), and they are the effect of genius and a happiness of nature, then they cost too little to be much thought of, and we rather wonder at others for admiring them, than at ourselves for having performed them. "Vix ea nostra voco" is the motto of spontaneous talent: and in neither case is conceit the exuberant growth of great original power or of great attainments.

In one particular, the uneducated man carries it hollow against the man of thought and refinement: the first can shoot in the *long bow*, which the last cannot for the life of him. He who has spent the best part of his time and wasted his best powers in endeavouring to answer the question—"What is truth?"—scorns a lie, and everything making the smallest approach to one. His mind by habit has become tenacious of, devoted to, the truth. The grossness and vulgarity of falsehood shock the delicacy of his perceptions, as much as it would shock the finest artist to be obliged to daub in a sign-post, or scrawl a caricature. He cannot make up his mind to derive any benefit from so pitiful and disgusting a source. Tell me that a man is a metaphysician, and at the same time that he is given to shallow and sordid boasting, and I will not believe you. After striving to raise himself to an equality with truth and nature by

patient investigation and refined distinctions (which few can make)—whether he succeed or fail, he cannot stoop to acquire a spurious reputation, or to advance himself or lessen others by paltry artifice and idle rhodomontade, which are in every one's power who has never known the value or undergone the labour of discovering a single truth. Gross personal and local interests bear the principal sway with the ignorant or mere man of the world, who considers not what things are in themselves, but what they are to him: the man of science attaches a higher importance to, because he finds a more constant pleasure in, the contemplation and pursuit of general and abstracted truths. Philosophy also teaches self-knowledge; and self-knowledge strikes equally at the root of any inordinate opinion of ourselves, or wish to impress others with idle admiration. Mathematicians have been remarked for persons of strict probity and a conscientious and somewhat literal turn of mind.* But are poets and romance-writers equally scrupulous and severe judges of themselves, and martyrs to right principle? I cannot acquit them of the charge of vanity, and

* I have heard it said that carpenters, who do everything by the square and line, are honest men, and I am willing to suppose it. Shakspeare, in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' makes Snug the Joiner the *moral* man of the piece.

a wish to aggrandise themselves in the eyes of the world, at the expense of a little false complaisance (what wonder when the world are so prone to admire, and they are so spoiled by indulgence in self-pleasing fancies?)—but in general they are too much taken up with their *ideal* creations, which have also a truth and keeping of their own, to misrepresent or exaggerate matters of fact, or to trouble their heads about them. The poet's waking thoughts are dreams: the liar has all his wits and senses about him, and thinks only of astonishing his hearers by some worthless assertion, a mixture of impudence and cunning. But what shall we say of the clergy and the priests of all countries? Are they not men of learning? And are they not, with few exceptions, noted for imposture and time-serving, much more than for a love of truth and candour? They are good subjects, it is true; bound to keep the peace, and hired to maintain certain opinions, not to inquire into them. So this is an exception to the rule, such as might be expected. I speak of the natural tendencies of things, and not of the false bias that may be given to them by their forced combination with other principles.

The worst effect of this depression of spirits, or of the "scholar's melancholy," here spoken of, is when it leads a man, from a distrust of

himself, to seek for low company, or to forget it by matching below himself. Gray is to be pitied, whose extreme diffidence or fastidiousness was such as to prevent his associating with his fellow collegians, or mingling with the herd; till at length, like the owl, shutting himself up from society and daylight, he was hunted and hooted at like the owl whenever he chanced to appear, and was even assailed and disturbed in the haunts in which "he held his solitary reign." He was driven from college to college, and subjected to a persecution the more harassing to a person of his indolent and retired habits. But he only shrunk the more within himself in consequence—read over his favourite authors—corresponded with his distant friends —was terrified out of his wits at the bare idea of having his portrait prefixed to his works; and probably died from nervous agitation at the publicity into which his name had been forced by his learning, taste, and genius. This monastic seclusion and reserve is, however, better than a career such as Porson's; who from not liking the restraints, or not possessing the exterior recommendations of good society, addicted himself to the lowest indulgencies, spent his days and nights in cider-cellars and pot-houses, cared not with whom or where he was, so that he had somebody to talk to and something to drink, "from humble *porter* to imperial tokay,"

(*a liquid*, acording to his own pun), and fell a martyr, in all likelihood, to what in the first instance was pure *mauvaise honte*. Nothing could overcome this propensity to low society and sotting, but the having something to do which required his whole attention and faculties; and then he shut himself up for weeks together in his chambers, or at the University, to collate old manuscripts, or edite a Greek tragedy, or expose a grave pedant, without seeing a single boon companion, or touching a glass of wine. I saw him once at the London Institution with a large patch of coarse brown paper on his nose, the skirts of his rusty black coat hung with cobwebs, and talking in a tone of suavity, approaching to condescension, to one of the managers. It is a pity that men should so lose themselves from a certain awkwardness and rusticity at the outset. But did not Sheridan make the same melancholy ending, and run the same fatal career, though in a higher and more brilliant circle? He did; and though not from exactly the same cause (for no one could accuse Sheridan's purple nose and flashing eye of a bashfulness—"modest as morning when she coldly eyes the youthful Phœbus!")—yet it was perhaps from one nearly allied to it, namely, the want of that noble independence and confidence in its own resources which should distinguish genius, and the dangerous ambition to

get sponsors and vouchers for it in persons of rank and fashion. The affectation of the society of lords is as mean and low-minded as the love of that of coblers and tapsters. It is that coblers and tapsters may admire, that we wish to be seen in the company of *their* betters. The tone of literary patronage is better than it was a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago. What dramatic author would think now of getting a lady of quality to take a box at the first night of a play to prevent its being damned by the pit? Do we not read the account of Parson Adams taking his ale in Squire Booby's kitchen with mingled incredulity and shame? At present literature has, to a considerable degree, found its level, and is hardly in danger, "deprived of its natural patrons and protectors, the great and noble, of being trodden in the mire, and trampled under the hoofs of a swinish multitude"—though it can never again hope to be, what learning once was in the persons of the priesthood, the lord and sovereign of principalities and powers. Fool that it was ever to forego its privileges, and loosen the strong hold it had on opinion in bigotry and superstition!

I remember hearing a lady of great sense and acuteness speak of it as a painful consequence of the natural shyness of scholars, that from the want of a certain address, or an acquaintance

with the common forms of society, they despair of making themselves agreeable to women of education and a certain rank in life, and throw away their fine sentiments and romantic tenderness on chambermaids and mantua-makers. Not daring to hope for success where it would be most desirable, yet anxious to realise in some way the dream of books and of their youth, they are willing to accept a return of affection which they count upon as a tribute of gratitude in those of lower circumstances (as if gratitude were ever bought by interest), and take up with the first Dulcinea del Toboso that they meet with, when, would they only try the experiment, they might do much better. Perhaps so: but there is here also a mixture of pride as well as modesty. The scholar is not only apprehensive of not meeting with a return of fondness where it might be most advantageous to him; but he is afraid of subjecting his self-love to the mortification of a repulse, and to the reproach of aiming at a prize far beyond his deserts. Besides, living (as he does) in an *ideal* world, he has it in his option to clothe his Goddess (be she who or what she may), with all the perfections his heart doats on; and he works up a dowdy of this ambiguous description *à son gré*, as an artist does a piece of dull clay, or the poet the sketch of some unrivalled heroine. The contrast is also the greater (and

not the less gratifying as being his own discovery) between his favourite figure and the back-ground of her original circumstances; and he likes her the better, inasmuch as, like himself, she owes all to her own merit—and *his* notice!

Possibly, the best cure for this false modesty, and for the uneasiness and extravagancies it occasions, would be, for the retired and abstracted student to consider that he properly belongs to another sphere of action, remote from the scenes of ordinary life, and may plead the excuse of ignorance, and the privilege granted to strangers and to those who do not speak the same language. If any one is travelling in a foreign diligence, he is not expected to shine nor to put himself forward, nor need he be out of countenance because he cannot: he has only to conform as well as he can to his new and temporary situation, and to study common propriety and simplicity of manners. Every thing has its own limits, a little centre of its own, round which it moves; so that our true wisdom lies in keeping to our own walk in life, however humble or obscure, and being satisfied if we can succeed in it. The best of us can do no more, and we shall only become ridiculous or unhappy by attempting it. We are ashamed, because we are at a loss in things to which we have no pretensions, and try to remedy our mis-

takes by committing greater. An overweening vanity or self-opinion is, in truth, often at the bottom of this weakness; and we shall be most likely to conquer the one by eradicating the other, or restricting it within due and moderate bounds.

ESSAY XVIII.

THE MAIN CHANCE.

"Search then the ruling passion: there alone
The wild are constant, and the cunning known,
The fool consistent, and the false sincere:
This clue once found unravels all the rest,
The prospect clears, and Wharton stands confest."
POPE.

I AM one of those who do not think that mankind are exactly governed by reason or a cool calculation of consequences. I rather believe that habit, imagination, sense, passion, prejudice, words, make a strong and frequent diversion from the right line of prudence and wisdom. I have been told, however, that these are merely the irregularities and exceptions, and that reason forms the rule or basis; that the understanding, instead of being the sport of the capricious and arbitrary decisions of the will, generally dictates the line of conduct it is to pursue, and that self-interest or the *main chance* is the unvarying load-star of our affections or

the chief ingredient in all our motives, that thrown in as ballast gives steadiness and direction to our voyage through life. I will not take upon me to give a verdict in this cause as judge; but I will try to plead one side of it as an advocate, perhaps a biassed and feeble one.

As the passions are said to be subject to the controul of reason, and as reason is resolved (in the present case) into an attention to our own interest or a practical sense of the value of money, it will not be amiss to inquire how much of this principle itself is founded in a rational estimate of things or is calculated for the end it proposes, or how much of it will turn out (when analysed) to be mere madness and folly, or a mixture, like all the rest, of obstinacy, whim, fancy, vanity, ill-nature, and so forth, or a nominal pursuit of good. This passion or an inordinate love of wealth shews itself, when it is strong, equally in two opposite ways, in saving or in spending, in avarice (or stinginess) and in extravagance. To examine each in their order. That lowest and most familiar form of covetousness, commonly called *stinginess*, is at present (it must be owned) greatly on the wane in civilised society; it has been driven out of fashion either by ridicule and good sense, or by the spread of luxury, or by supplying the mind with other sources of interest, besides those which relate to the bare means of subsistence, so that it may

almost be considered as a vice or absurdity struck off the list as a set off to some that in the change of manners and the progress of dissipation have been brought upon the stage. It is not, however, so entirely banished from the world, but that examples of it may be found to our purpose. It seems to have taken refuge in the petty provincial towns, or in old baronial castles in the north of Scotland, where it is still triumphant. To go into this subject somewhat in detail. What is more common in these places than to stint the servants in their wages, to allowance them in the merest necessaries, never to indulge them with a morsel of savoury food, and to lock up everything from them as if they were thieves or common vagabonds broke into the house? The natural consequence is that the mistresses live in continual *hot water* with their servants, keep watch and ward over them—the pantry being in a state of siege—grudge them every mouthful, every appearance of comfort or moment of leisure, and torment their own souls every minute of their lives about what if left wholly to itself would not make a difference of five shillings at the year's end. There are families so notorious for this kind of *surveillance* and meanness, that no servant will go to live with them; for to clench the matter, they are obliged to stay if they do, as under these amiable establishments, and to

provide against an evasion of their signal advantages, domestics are never hired but by the half-year. Cases have been known where servants have taken a pleasant revenge on their masters and mistresses without intending it: where the example of sordid saving and meanness having taken possession of those who in the first instance were victims to it, they have conscientiously applied it to the benefit of all parties, and scarcely suffered a thing to enter the house for the whole six months they stayed in it. To pass over, however, those cases which may plead poverty as their excuse, what shall we say to a lady of fortune (the sister of an old-fashioned Scotch laird) allowing the fruit to rot in the gardens and hot-houses of a fine old mansion in large quantities sooner than let any of it be given away in presents to the neighbours, and when peremptorily ordered by the master of the house to send a basket-full every morning to a sick friend, purchasing a small pottle for the purpose, and satisfying her mind (an intelligent and well-informed one) with this miserable subterfuge? Nay farther, the same person, whenever they had green peas or other rarities served up at table, could hardly be prevailed on to help the guests to them, but if possible sent them away, though no other usecould now be made of them, and she would never see them again! Is there common sense in this;

or is it not more like madness? But is it not, at the same time, human nature? Let us stop to explain a little. In my view, the real motive of action in this and other similar cases of grasping penuriousness has no more reference to self-love (properly so called) than artificial fruit and flowers have to natural ones. A certain form or outside appearance of utility may deceive the mind, but the natural, pulpy, wholesome, nutritious substance, the principle of vitality, is gone. To this callous, frigid habit of mind the real uses of things harden and crystallise; the pith and marrow are extracted out of them, leaving nothing but the husk or shell. By a regular process, the idea of property is gradually abstracted from the advantage it may be of even to ourselves; and to a well-drilled, thorough-bred Northern house-keeper (such as I have spoken of) the fruits or other produce of her garden would come at last to be things no more to be eaten or enjoyed than her jewels or trinkets, which are professedly of no use but to be *kept* as symbols of wealth, to be occasionally looked at, and carefully guarded from the approach of any unhallowed touch. The calculation of consequences or of benefit to accrue to any living person is so far from being the main-spring in this mechanical operation that it is never once thought of, or regarded with peevishness and impatience as

an unwelcome intruder, because it must naturally divert the mind from the warped and false bias it has taken. The feeling of property is here removed from the sphere of practice to a chimerical and fictitious one. In the case of not sending the fruit out of the house, there might be some lurking idea of its being possibly wanted at home, that it might be sent to some one else, or made up into conserves: but when different articles of food are actually placed on the table, to hang back from using or offering them to others, is a deliberate infatuation. They *must be* destroyed, they *could not* appear again; and yet this person's heart failed her and shrunk back from the only opportunity of making the proper use of them with a petty, sensitive apprehension, as if it were a kind of sacrilege done to a cherished and favourite object. The impulse to save was become by indulgence a sort of desperate propensity and forlorn hope, no longer the understood means, but the mistaken end: habit had completely superseded the exercise and controul of reason, and the rage of making the most of everything *by making no use of it at all* resisted to the last moment the shocking project of feasting on a defenceless dish of green peas (that *would* fetch so much in the market) as an outrage against the Goddess of Stinginess and torture to the soul of Thrift! The principle of economy is inverted; and in order

to avoid the possibility of wasting anything, the way with such philosophers and housewives is to abstain from touching it altogether. Is not this a common error? Or are we conscious of our motives in such cases? Or do we not flatter ourselves by imputing every such act of idle folly to the necessity of adopting some sure and judicious plan to shun ruin, beggary, and the profligate abuse of wealth? An old maid in the same northern school of humanity calling upon some young ladies, her neighbours, was so alarmed and scandalised at finding the *safe* open in their absence, that she engaged herself to drink tea the same afternoon, for the express purpose of reading them a lecture on the unheard-of imprudence and impropriety of such an example, and was mobbed on her way home by the poor servant-girl (who had been made the subject of her declamation) in return for her uncalled-for interference. *She* had nothing to fear, nothing to lose: *her* safe was carefully locked up. Why then all this flutter, fidgetty anxiety, and itch of meddling? Out of pure romantic generosity—because the idea of anything like comfort or liberality to a servant shocked her economical and screwed-up prejudices as much as the impugning any article of her religious or moral creed could have done. The very truisms and literal refinements of this passion are then sheer impertinence. The house-

keeper came into the parlour of a "*big ha' house*," in the same land of cakes and hospitality, to say that the workmen had refused to eat their dinner. "Why so?" Because there was nothing but sowins and sour milk. "Then they must go without a dinner," said the young mistress, delighted; "there is nothing else in the house for them." Yet the larder at that time groaned with cold rounds of beef, hams, pasties, and the other plentiful remains of a huge entertainment the day before. This was flippancy and ill-nature, as well as a wrong notion of self-interest. Is it at all wonderful that a decent servant-girl, when applied to go to this place, laughed at the idea of a service where there was nothing to eat? Yet this attention to the *main chance* on her part, had it come to the lady's knowledge, would have been treated as a great piece of insolence. So little conception have such people of their own obligations on the claims of others! The clergyman of the parish (prolific in this sort of anecdote), a hearty, good sort of man enough, but irritable withal, took it into his head to fly into a violent passion if ever he found the glasses or spoons left out in the kitchen, and he always went into the kitchen to look after this sort of excitement. He pretended to be mightily afraid that the one would be broken (to his irreparable loss) and the other stolen, though there was no danger of either: he wanted an excuse

to fret and fume about something. On the death of his wife he sent for her most intimate friend to condole and consult with, and having made some necessary arrangements, begged as a peculiar favour that she would look into the kitchen to see if the glasses and silver spoons were in their places. She repressed a smile at such a moment out of regard to his feelings, which were serious and acute; but burst into a fit of unrestrained laughter as soon as she got home. So ridiculous a thing is human nature, even to ourselves! Either our actions are absurd, or we are absurd in our constant censure and exposure of others. I would not from choice go into these details, but I might be required to fill up a vague outline; and the examples of folly, spite, and meanness are unfortunately "sown like a thick scurf o'er life!"

Let us turn the tables and look at the other side of this sober, solid, engrossing passion for property and its appendages. A man lays out a thousand, nay, sometimes several thousand pounds in purchasing a fine picture. This is thought by the vulgar a very fantastical folly and unaccountable waste of money. Why so? No one would give such a sum for a picture, unless there were others ready to offer nearly the same sum, and who are likely to appreciate its value and envy him the distinction. It is then a sign of taste, a proof of wealth to pos-

sess it; it is an ornament and a luxury. If the same person lays out the same sum of money in building or purchasing a fine house, or enriching it with costly furniture, no notice is taken. This is supposed to be perfectly natural and in order. Yet both are equally gratuitous pieces of extravagance, and the value of the objects is in either case equally *ideal*. It will be asked, "But what is the use of the picture?" And what, pray, is the use of the fine house or costly furniture, unless to be looked at, to be admired, and to display the taste and magnificence of the owner? Are not pictures and statues as much furniture as gold plate or jasper tables; or does the circumstance of the former having a meaning in them and appealing to the imagination as well as to the senses, neutralise their virtue and render it entirely chimerical and visionary? It is true, every one must have a house of some kind, furnished somehow, and the superfluous so far gross imperceptibly out of the necessary. But a fine house, fine furniture, is necessary to no man, nor of more value than the plainest, except as a matter of taste, of fancy, of luxury, and ostentation. Again, no doubt, if a person is in the habit of keeping a number of servants, and entertaining a succession of fashionable guests, he must have more room than he wants for himself, apartments suitably decorated to receive them, and offices and stables for their horses and

retinue. But is all this unavoidably dictated as a consequence of his attention to the *main chance*, or is it not sacrificing the latter and making it a stalking horse to his vanity, dissipation, or love of society and hospitality?

We are at least as fond of spending money as of making it. If a man runs through a fortune in the way here spoken of, it is out of love to himself? Yet, who scruples to run through a fortune in this way, or accuses himself of any extraordinary disinterestedness or love of others? One bed is as much as any one can sleep in, one room is as much as he can dine in, and he may have another for study or to retire to after dinner; but he can only want more than this for the accommodation of his friends or the admiration of the stranger. At Fonthill Abbey (to take an extreme illustration) there was not a single room fit to sit, lie, or stand in: the whole was cut up into pigeon holes, or spread out into long endless galleries. The building this huge, ill-assorted pile cost, I believe, nearly a million of money; and if the circumstance was mentioned, it occasioned an expression of surprise at the amount of the wealth that had been thus squandered; but if it was said that a hundred pounds had been laid out on a highly-finished picture, there was the same astonishment expressed at its misdirection. The sympathetic auditor makes up his mind to the first and

greatest outlay, by reflecting that in case of the worst the building materials alone will fetch something considerable; or in the very idea of stone walls and mortar there is something solid and tangible, that repels the charge of frivolous levity or fine sentiment. This quaint excrescence in architecture, preposterous and ill-constructed as it was, occasioned, I suspect, many a heart-ache and bitter comparison to the throng of fashionable visitants; and I conceive it was the very want of comfort and convenience that enhanced this feeling, by magnifying as it were from contrast the expense that had been incurred in realising an idle whim. When we judge thus perversely and invidiously of the employment of wealth by others, I cannot think that we are guided in our own choice of means to ends by a simple calculation of downright use and personal accommodation. The gentleman who purchased Fonthill, and was supposed to be possessed of wealth enough to purchase half a dozen more Fonthills, lived there himself for some time in a state of the greatest retirement; rose at six, and read till four; rode out for an hour for the benefit of the air, and dined abstemiously for the safe of his health. I could do all this myself. What then became of the rest of his fortune? It was lying in the funds or embarked in business to make it yet greater: that he might still rise at six and read till four,

&c. It was of no other earthly use to him; for he did not wish to make a figure in the world, or to throw it away on studs of horses, or equipages, entertainments, gaming, electioneering, subscriptions to charitable institutions, mistresses, or any of the usual fashionable modes of squandering wealth for the amusement and wonder of others and our own fancied enjoyment. Mr Farquhar did not probably lay out five hundred a-year on himself: yet it cost Mr Beckford, who also led a life of perfect seclusion, twenty thousand a-year to defray the expenses of his table and of his household establishment. When I find that such and so various are the tastes of men, I am a little puzzled to know what is meant by self-interest, of which some persons talk so fluently, as if it was a *jack-in-a-box*, which they could take out and show you, and which they tell you is the object that all men equally aim at. If money, is it for its own sake, or the sake of other things? Is it to hoard it, or to spend it on ourselves or others? In all these points we find the utmost diversity and contradiction, both of feeling and practice. Certainly he who puts his money into a strong box, and he who puts it into a dice-box, must be allowed to have a very different idea of the *main chance*. If by this phrase be understood a principle of self-preservation, I grant that while we live we must not starve, and that

necessity has no law. Beyond this point, all seems nearly left to chance or whim, and so far are all the world from being agreed in their definition of this redoubtable term, that one-half of them may be said to think and act in diametrical opposition to the other.

Avarice is the miser's dream, as fame is the poet's. A calculation of physical profit or loss is almost as much out of the question in the one case as in the other. The one has set his mind on gold, the other on praise, as the *summum bonum* or object of his bigoted idolatry and daily contemplation, not for any private and sinister ends. It is the immediate pursuit, not the remote or reflex consequence that gives wings to the passion. There is indeed a reference to self in either case, that fixes and concentrates it, but not a gross or sordid one. Is not the desire to accumulate and leave a vast estate behind us, equally romantic with the desire to leave a posthumous name behind us? Is not the desire of distinction, of something to be known and remembered by, the paramount consideration? And are not the privations we undergo, the sacrifices and exertions we make, for either object nearly akin? A child makes a huge snow-ball to show his skill and perseverance, and as something to wonder at, not that he can swallow it as an ice, or warm his hands at it, and though the next day's sun will dissolve

it; and the man accumulates a pile of wealth for the same reason principally, or to find employment for his time, his imagination, and his will. I deny that to watch and superintend the return of millions can be of any other use to him than to watch the returns of the heavenly bodies, or to calculate their distances, or to contemplate eternity, or infinity, or the sea, or the dome of St Peter's, or any other object that excites curiosity or interest from its magnitude and importance. Do we not look at the most barren mountain with thrilling awe and wonder? And is it strange that we should gaze at a mountain of gold with satisfaction, when we can besides say, "This is ours, with all the power that belongs to it?" Every passion, however plodding or prosaic, has its poetical side. A miser is the true alchemist, the magician in his cell, who overlooks a mighty experiment, who sees dazzling visions, and who wields the will of others at his nod, but to whom all other hopes and pleasures are dead, and who is cut off from all connexion with his kind. He lives in a splendid hallucination, a waking trance, and so far it is well: but if he thinks he has any other need or use for all this endless store (any more than to swill the ocean), he deceives himself, and is no conjuror after all. He goes on, however, mechanically adding to his stock, and fancying that great riches is great gain, that every particle that swells the heap is something

in reserve against the evil day, and a defence against that poverty which he dreads more the farther he is removed from it, as the more giddy the height to which we have attained, the more frightful does the gulf yawn below—so easily does habit get the mastery of reason, and so nearly is passion allied to madness!—But he is laying up for his heirs and successors:—in toiling for them, and sacrificing himself, is he properly attending to the *main chance?*

This is the turn the love of money takes in cautious, dry, recluse, and speculative minds. If it were the pure and abstract love of money, it could take no other turn but this. But in a different class of characters, the sociable, the vain, and imaginative, it takes just the contrary one, *viz.* to expense, extravagance, and ostentation. It here loves to display itself in every fantastic shape and with every reflected lustre; in houses, in equipage, in dress, in a retinue of friends and dependents, in horses, in hounds—to glitter in the eye of fashion, to be echoed by the roar of folly, and buoyed up for a while like a bubble on the surface of vanity, to sink all at once and irrecoverably into an abyss of ruin and bankruptcy. Does it foresee this result? Does it care for it? What, then, becomes of the calculating principle, that can neither be hoodwinked nor bribed from its duty? Does it do nothing for us in this critical emergency? It is blind, deaf, and insensible to all

but the noise, confusion, and glare of objects by which it is fascinated and lulled into a fatal repose! One man ruins himself by the vanity of associating with lords, another by his love of low company; one by his fondness for building, another by his rage for keeping open house, and private theatricals; one by philosophical experiments, another by embarking in every ticklish and fantastical speculation that is proposed to him; one throws away an estate on a law-suit, another on a die, a third on a horse-race, a fourth on *virtu*, a fifth on a drab, a sixth on a contested election, &c. There is no dearth of instances to fill the page or complete the group of profound calculators, of inflexible martyrs to the *main chance*. Let any of these discreet and well-advised persons have the veil torn from their darling follies by experience, and be gifted with a double share of wisdom and a second fortune to dispose of, and each of them, so far from being warned by experience or disaster, will only be the more resolutely bent to assert the independence of his choice and throw it away the self-same road the other went before,—on his vanity of associating with lords, on his love of low company, on his fondness for building, on his rage for keeping open house or private theatricals, on philosophical experiments, on fantastic speculations, on a law-suit, on a dice box, on a favourite horse, on a picture, on a mistress, or

election contest, and so on through the whole of the chapter of accidents and cross-purposes. There is an admirable description of this sort of infatuation with folly and ruin in Madame D'Arblay's account of Harrel in 'Cecilia;' and though the picture is highly wrought and carried to the utmost length, yet I maintain that the principle is common. I myself have known more than one individual in the same predicament; and therefore cannot think that the deviations from the line of strict prudence and wisdom are so rare or trifling as the theory I am opposing represents them, or I must have been singularly unfortunate in my acquaintance. Out of a score of persons of this class I could mention several that have ruined their fortunes out of mere freak; others that are in a state of dotage and imbecility, for fear of being robbed of all they are worth. The rest care nothing about the matter. So that this boasted and unfailing attention to the *main chance* resolves itself, when strong, into mad profusion or griping penury; or, if weak, is null and yields to other motives. Such is the conclusion to which my observation of life has led me: if I am quite wrong, it is hard that in a world abounding in such characters I should not have met with a single practical philosopher.*

* Mr Bentham proposes to new-model the penal code on the principle of a cool and systematic calculation of con-

A girl in a country town resolves never to marry any one under a duke or a lord. Good. This may be very well as an ebullition of spleen or vanity; but is there much common sense or regard to her own satisfaction in it? Were there any likelihood of her succeeding in her resolution, she would not make it; for it is the very distinction to be attained that piques her ambition, and leads her to gratify her conceit of herself by affecting to look down on any lower matches. Let her suffer ever so much mortification or chagrin in the prosecution of her scheme, it only confirms her the more in it; the spirit of contradiction and the shame of owning herself

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sequences. Yet of all philosophers, the candidates for Panopticons and Penitentiaries are the most shortsighted and refractory. Punishment has scarcely any effect upon them. Thieves steal under the scaffold; and if a person's previous feelings and habits do not prevent his running the risk of the gallows, be assured that the fear of consequences, or his having already escaped it, with all the good resolutions he may have made on the occasion, will not prevent his exposing himself to it a second time. It is true, most people have a natural aversion to being hanged. The perseverance of culprits in their evil courses seems a fatality, which is strengthened by the prospect of what is to follow. Mr Bentham argues that all men act from calculation; "even madmen reason." So far it may be true that the world is not unlike a great Bedlam, or answers to the title of an old play—"A mad world, my masters."

defeated, increase with every new disappointment and every year of painful probation. At least this is the case while she chooses to think there is any chance left. But what, after all, is this haughty and ridiculous pretension founded on? Is it owing to a more commanding view and a firmer grasp of consequences, or of her own interest? No such thing: she is as much captivated by the fancied sound of "My Lady," and dazzled by the image of a coronet-coach, as the girl who marries a footman is smit with his broad shoulders, laced coat, and rosy cheeks. "But why must I be always in extremes? Few misses make vows of celibacy or marry their footmen." Take then the broad question:—Do they generally marry from the convictions of the understanding, or make the choice that is most likely to ensure their future happiness, or that they themselves approve afterwards? I think the answer must be in the negative; and yet love and marriage are among the weightiest and most serious concerns of life. Mutual regard, good temper, good sense, good character, or a conformity of tastes and dispositions, have notoriously and lamentably little to say in it. On the contrary, it is most frequently those things that pique and provoke opposition, instead of those which promise concord and sympathy, that decide the choice and inflame the will by the love of conquest, or of overcoming difficulty. Or it is a complexion

or a fine set of teeth, or air, or dress, or a fine person, or false calves, or affected consequence, or a reputation for gallantry, or a flow of spirits, or a flow of words, or forward coquetry, or assumed indifference,—something that appeals to the senses, the fancy, or to our pride, and determines us to throw away our happiness for life. Neither, then, in this case, on which so much depends, are the *main chance* and our real interest by any means the same thing.

"Now all ye ladies of fair Scotland,
And ladies of England that happy would prove,
Marry never for houses, nor marry for land,
Nor marry for nothing but only love." *

Old Ballad.

Or take the passion of love where it has other objects and consequences in view. Is reason any match for the poison of this passion, where it has been once imbibed? I might just as well be told that reason is a cure for madness, or the

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* "Have I not seen a household where love was not?" says the author of the 'Betrothed;' "where, although there was worth and good will, and enough of the means of life, all was embittered by regrets, which were not only vain, but criminal?"—"I would take the *Ghost's* word for a thousand pound," or in preference to that of any man living, though I was told, in the streets of Edinburgh, that Dr Jamieson, the author of the 'Dictionary,' was quite as great a man!

bite of a venomous serpent. Are not health, fortune, friends, character, peace of mind, everything sacrificed to its idlest impulse? Are the instances rare, or are they not common and tragical? The *main chance* does not serve the turn here. Does the prospect of certain ruin break the fascination to its frail victim, or does it not render the conquest more easy and secure that the seducer has already triumphed over and deserted a hundred other victims? A man *à bonnes fortunes* is the most irresistible personage in the lists of gallantry. Take drunkenness again, that vice which till within these few years (and even still) was fatal to the health, the constitution, the fortunes of so many thousands, and the peace of so many families in Great Britain. I would ask what remonstrance of friends, what lessons of experience, what resolutions of amendment, what certainty of remorse and suffering, however exquisite, would deter the confirmed sot (where the passion for this kind of excitement had once become habitual and the immediate want of it was felt) from indulging his propensity and taking his full swing, notwithstanding the severe and imminent punishment to follow upon his excess? The consequence of not abstaining from his favourite beverage is not doubtful and distant (a thing in the clouds), but close at his side, staring him in the face, and felt perhaps in all

its aggravations that very morning, yet the recollection of this and of the next day's dawn is of no avail against the momentary craving and headlong impulse given by the first application of the glass to his lips. The present temptation is indeed heightened by the threatened alternative. I know this as a rule, that the stronger the repentance, the surer the relapse and the more hopeless the cure! The being engrossed by the present moment, by the present feeling, whatever it be, whether of pleasure or pain, is the evident cause of both. Few instances have been known of a final reformation on this head. Yet it is a clear case; and reason, if it were that giant that it is represented in anything but ledgers and books of accounts, would put down the abuse in an instant. It is true, this infirmity is more particularly chargeable to the English and to other northern nations, and there has been a considerable improvement among us of late years; but I suspect it is owing to a change of manners and to the opening of new sources of amusement (without the aid of ardent spirits flung in to relieve the depression of our animal spirits) more than to the excellent treatises which have been written against the use of fermented liquors, or to an increasing tender regard to our own comfort, health, and happiness, in the breast of individuals. We still find plenty of ways of torment-

ing ourselves and sporting with the feelings of others! I will say nothing of a passion for gaming here, as too obvious an illustration of what I mean. It is more rare, and hardly to be looked on as epidemic with us. But few that have dabbled in this vice have not become deeply involved, and few (or none) that have done so have ever retraced their steps or returned to sober caculations of the *main chance*. The majority, it is true, are not gamesters; but where the passion does exist, it completely tyrannizes over and stifles the voice of common sense, reason, and humanity. How many victims has the point of honour! I will not pretend that, as matters stand, it may not be necessary to fight a duel, under certain circumstances and on certain provocations, even in a prudential point of view (though this again proves how little the maxims and practices of the world are regulated by a mere consideration of personal safety and welfare); but I do say that the rashness with which this responsibility is often incurred, and the even seeking for trifling causes of quarrel, shows anything but a consistent regard to self-interest as a general principle of action, or rather betrays a total recklessness of consequences, when opposed to pique, petulance, or passion.

Before I proceed to answer a principal objection (and indeed a staggering one at first sight),

I will mention here, that I think it strongly confirms my view of human nature that men form their opinions much more from prejudice than reason. The proof that they do is that they form such opposite ones, when the abstract premises and independent evidence are the same. How few Calvinists become Lutherans! How few Papists Protestants! How few Tories Whigs!* Each shuts his eyes equally to facts or arguments, and persists in the view of the subject that custom, pride, and obstinacy dictate. Interest is no more regarded than reason; for it is often at the risk both of life and fortune that these opinions have been maintained, and it is uniformly when parties have run highest, and the strife has been deadliest, that people have been most forward to stake their existence and everything belonging to them on some unintelligible dogma or article of an old-fashioned creed. Half the wars and fightings, martyrdoms, persecutions, feuds, antipathies, heart-burnings in the world have been about some distinction, "some trick not worth an egg"—so ready are mankind to sacrifice their all to a mere name! It may be urged,

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* *Certes*, more Whigs become Tories. This may also be accounted for satisfactorily, though not very rationally.

that the good of our souls, or our welfare in a future state of being, is a rational and well-grounded motive for these religious extravagances. And this is true, so far as religious zeal falls in with men's passions or the spirit of the times. A bigot was formerly ready to cut his neighbour's throat to go to heaven, but not so ready to reform his own life, or give up a single vice or gratification, notwithstanding all the pains and penalties denounced upon it, and of which his faith in Holy Church did not suffer him to doubt a moment!

But it is contended here that in matters not of doctrinal speculation, but of private life and domestic policy, every one consults and understands his own interest; that, whatever other *hobbies* he may have, he minds this as the main object, and contrives to make both ends meet, in spite of seeming inattention and real difficulties. "If we look around us," says a shrewd, hard-headed Scotchman, "and take examples from the neighbourhood in which we live, we shall find that, allowing for occasional exceptions, diversities, and singularities, the *main chance* is still stuck to with rigid and unabating pertinacity—the accounts are wound up, and everything is right at the year's end, whatever freaks or fancies may have intervened in the course of it. The business of life goes on (which is the

principal thing), and every man's house stands on its own bottom. This is the case in Nicholson street, in the next street to it, and in the next street to that, and in the whole of Edinburgh—Scotland and England to boot." This, I allow, is a *home thrust*, and I must parry is how I can. It is a kind of heavy broad-wheeled waggon of an objection, that makes a formidable awkward appearance, and takes up so much of the road, that I shall have a lucky escape if I can dash by it in my light gig without being upset or crushed to atoms. The persons who in the present instance have the charge of it in its progress through the streets of Edinburgh are, a constitutional lawyer, a political economist, an opposition editor, and an ex-officio surveyor of the customs—fearful odds against one poor metaphysician! Their machine of human life, I confess, puts me a little in mind of those square-looking caravans one sometimes meets on the road, in which they transport wild beasts from place to place; and dull, heavy, safe, and flat as they look, the immates continue their old habits; the monkeys play their tricks, and the panthers lick their jaws for human blood, though cramped and confined in their excursions. So the vices and follies, when they cannot break loose, do their worst *inside* this formal conveyance, the *main chance*. As this

ovation is intended to pass up High street for the honour of the Scottish capital, I should wish it to stop at the shop door of Mr Bartholine Saddletree, to see if he is at home, or in the courts. Also to inquire whether the suit of Peter Peebles is yet ended; and to take the opinion of counsel how many of the Highland lairds, or Scottish noblemen and gentlemen, that were *out* in the Fifteen and the Forty-five, perilled their lives and fortunes in the "good cause" from an eye to the *main chance*. The Baron of Bradwardine would have scorned such a suggestion; nay, it would have been below Balmawhapple or even Killancureit. But "the age of chivalry is gone, and that of sophists, economists, and calculators, has succeeded." I should say that the risk, the secrecy, the possibility of the leaders having their heads stuck on Temple Bar and their estates confiscated were among the foremost causes that inflamed their zeal and stirred their blood to the enterprise. Hardship, danger, exile, death, these words smack of honour more than the *main chance*. The modern Scotch may be loyal on this thriving principle: their ancestors found their loyalty a very losing concern, yet they persevered in it till, and long after, it became a desperate cause. But patriotism and loyalty (true or false) are important and powerful prin-

ciples in human affairs, though not always selfish and calculating. Honour is one great standard-bearer and puissant leader in the struggle of human life; and less than honour (a nickname or a bug-bear) is enough to set the multitude together by the ears, whether in civil, religious, or private brawls. But to return to our Edinburgh shop-keepers, those practical models of wisdom, and authentic epitomes of human nature. Say that by their "canny ways and pawy looks" they keep their names out of the 'Gazette,' yet still care (not the less perhaps) mounts behind their counters, and sits in their back-shops. A tradesman is not a bankrupt at the year's end. But what does it signify, if he is hen-pecked in the meantime, or quarrels with his wife, or beats his apprentices, or has married a woman twice as old as himself for her money, or has been jilted by his maid, or fuddles himself every night, or is laying in an apoplexy by over-eating himself, or is believed by nobody, or is a furious Whig or Tory, or a knave, or a fool, or one envious of the success of his neighbours, or dissatisfied with his own, or surly, or eaten up with indolence and procrastination, never easy but bashful and awkward in company (though with a vast desire to shine), or has some personal defect or weak side on which the Devil is sure to assail him, and the venting his spleen and irri-

tability on which, through some loop-hole or other, makes the real business and torment of his life—that of his shop may go on as it pleases. Such is the perfection of reason and the triumph of the sovereign good, where there are no strong passions to disturb, or no great vices to sully it! The humours collect, the will will have head, the petty passions ferment, and we start some grievance or other, and hunt it down every hour in the day, or the machine of *still-life* could not go on even in North Britain. But were I to grant the full force and extent of the objection, I should still say it does not bear upon my view of the subject or general assertion, that reason is an unequal match for passion. Business is a kind of gaoler or task-master, that keeps its vassals in good order while they are under its eye, as the slave or culprit performs his task with the whip hanging over him, and punishment immediately to follow neglect; but the question is, what he would do with his recovered freedom, or what course the mind will for the most part pursue, when in the range of its general conduct it has its choice to make between a distant, doubtful, sober, rational good (or *average* state of being), and some one object of comparatively little value, that strikes the senses, flatters our pride, gives scope to the imagination, and has all the strength of passion and inclina-

tion on its side. The *main chance* then is a considerable exception, but not a fair one or a case in point, since it falls under a different head and line of argument.

The fault of reason in general (which takes in the *whole* instead of parts) is, that its objects, though of the utmost extent and importance, are not defined and tangible. This fault cannot be found with the pursuit of trade and commerce. It is not a mere dry, abstract, undefined, speculative, however steady and well-founded conviction of the understanding. It has other levers and pullies to enforce it, besides those of reason and reflection; as follows:—

1. The value of money is positive or specific. The interest in it is a sort of mathematical interest, reducible to number and quantity. Ten is always more than one; a part is never greater than the whole; the good we seek or attain in this way has a technical denomination; and I do not deny that in matters of strict calculation, the principle of calculation will naturally bear great sway. The returns of profit and loss are regular and mechanical, and the operations of business or the *main chance* are so too. But commonly speaking, we judge by the *degree* of excitement, not by the ultimate quantity. Thus we prefer a draught of nectar to the recovery of

our health, and are on most occasions ready to exclaim,—

"An ounce of sweet is worth a pound of sour."

Yet there is a point at which self-will and humour stop. A man will take brandy, which is a *kind of slow poison*, but he will not take *actual* poison knowing it to be such, however slow the operation or bewitching the taste; because here the effect is absolutely fixed and certain, not variable, nor in the power of the imagination to elude or trifle with it. I see no courage in battle, but in going on what is called the *forlorn hope*.

2. Business is also an affair of habit: it calls for incessant and daily application; and what was at first a matter of necessity to supply our wants, becomes often a matter of necessity to employ our time. The man of business wants work for his head; the labourer and mechanic for his hands; so that the love of action, of difficulty and competition, the stimulus of success or failure is perhaps as strong an ingredient in men's ordinary pursuits as the love of gain. We find persons pursuing science or any *hobby-horsical* whim or handicraft they have taken a fancy to, or persevering in a losing concern with just the same ardour and obstinacy. As to the choice of a pursuit in life, a man may not be

forward to engage in business, but being once in, does not like to turn back amidst the pity of friends and the derision of enemies. How difficult is it to prevent those who have a turn for any art or science from going into these pursuits, however unprofitable! Nay, how difficult is it often to prevent those who have no turn that way, but prefer starving to a certain income! If there is one in a family brighter than the rest, he is immediately designed for one of the learned professions. Really, the dull and plodding people of the world have not much reason to boast of their superior wisdom or numbers: they are in an involuntary majority!

3. The value of money is an *exchangeable* value; that is, this pursuit is available towards and convertible into a great many others. A person is in want of money, and mortgages an estate to throw it away upon a round of entertainments and company. The passion or motive here is not a hankering after money, but society, and the individual will ruin himself for this object. Another, who has the same passion for show, and a certain style of living, tries to gain a fortune in trade to indulge it, and only goes to work in a more round-about way. I remember a story of a common mechanic at Manchester, who laid out the hard-earned savings of the week in hiring a horse and livery-servant to ride behind him to Stockport every Sunday,

and to dine there at an ordinary, like a gentleman. The pains bestowed upon the *main chance* here was only a cover for another object, which exercised a ridiculous predominance over his mind. Money will purchase a horse, a house, a picture, leisure, dissipation, or whatever the individual has a fancy for, that is to be purchased; but it does not follow that he is fond of all these, or of whatever will promote his real interest, because he is fond of money, but that he has a passion for some one of these objects, to which he would probably sacrifice all the rest, and his own peace and happiness into the bargain.

4. The *main chance* is an instrument of various passions, but is directly opposed to none of them, with the single exception of indolence, or the *vis inertiæ*, which of itself is seldom strong enough to master it, without the aid of some other incitement. A barrister sticks to his duty, as long as he has only his love of ease to conquer; but he flings up his briefs or neglects them, if he thinks he can make a figure in Parliament. A servant-girl stays in her place and does her work, though perhaps lazy and slatternly, because no immediate temptation occurs strong enough to interfere with the necessity of gaining her bread, but she goes away with a bastard-child, because here passion and desire come into play, though the consequence is, that

she loses not only her place, but her character and every prospect in life. No one, therefore, flings away the *main chance* without a motive, any more than he voluntarily puts his hand into the fire or breaks his neck by jumping out of window. A man must live; the first step is a point of necessity: every man would live well, the second is a point of luxury. The having or even acquiring wealth does not prevent our enjoying it in various ways. A man may give his mornings to business, and his evenings to pleasure. There is no contradiction in this; nor does he sacrifice his ruling passion by this, any more than the man of letters by study, or the soldier by an attention to discipline. Reason and passion are opposed, not passion and business. The sot, the glutton, the debauchee, the gamester, must all have money, to make their own use of it, and they may indulge all these passions and their avarice at the same time. It is only when the last becomes the ruling passion that it puts a prohibition on the others. In that case, everything else is lost sight of; but it is seldom carried to this length, or when it is, it is far from being another name, either in its means or ends, for reason, sense, or happiness, as I have already shown.

I have taken no notice hitherto of ambition or virtue, or scarcely of the pursuits of fame

or intellect. Yet all these are important and respectable divisions of the map of human life. Who ever charged Mr Pitt with a want of common sense, because he did not die worth a plumb? Had it been proposed to Lord Byron to forfeit every penny of his estate, or every particle of his reputation, would he have hesitated to part with the former? Is not a loss of character, a stain upon honour, as severe a blow as any reverse of fortune? Do not the richest heiresses in the city marry for a title, and think themselves well off? Are there not patriots who think or dream all their lives about their country's good; philanthropists who rave about liberty and humanity at a certain yearly loss? Are there not studious men who never once thought of bettering their circumstances? Are not the liberal professions held more respectable than business, though less lucrative? Might not most people do better than they do, but that they postpone their interest to their indolence, their taste for reading, their love of pleasure, or to some other influence? And is it not generally understood that all men can make a fortune or succeed in the *main chance*, who have but that one idea in their heads? Lastly, are there not those who pursue or husband wealth for their own good, for the benefit of their friends or the relief of the distressed? But as the

examples are rare, and might be supposed to make against myself, I shall not insist upon them. I think I have said enough to vindicate or apologise for my first position—

> "Masterless passion sways us to the mood
> Of what it likes or loathes."

—or if not to make good my ground, to march out with flying colours and beat of drum.

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